

# *The* DECISION

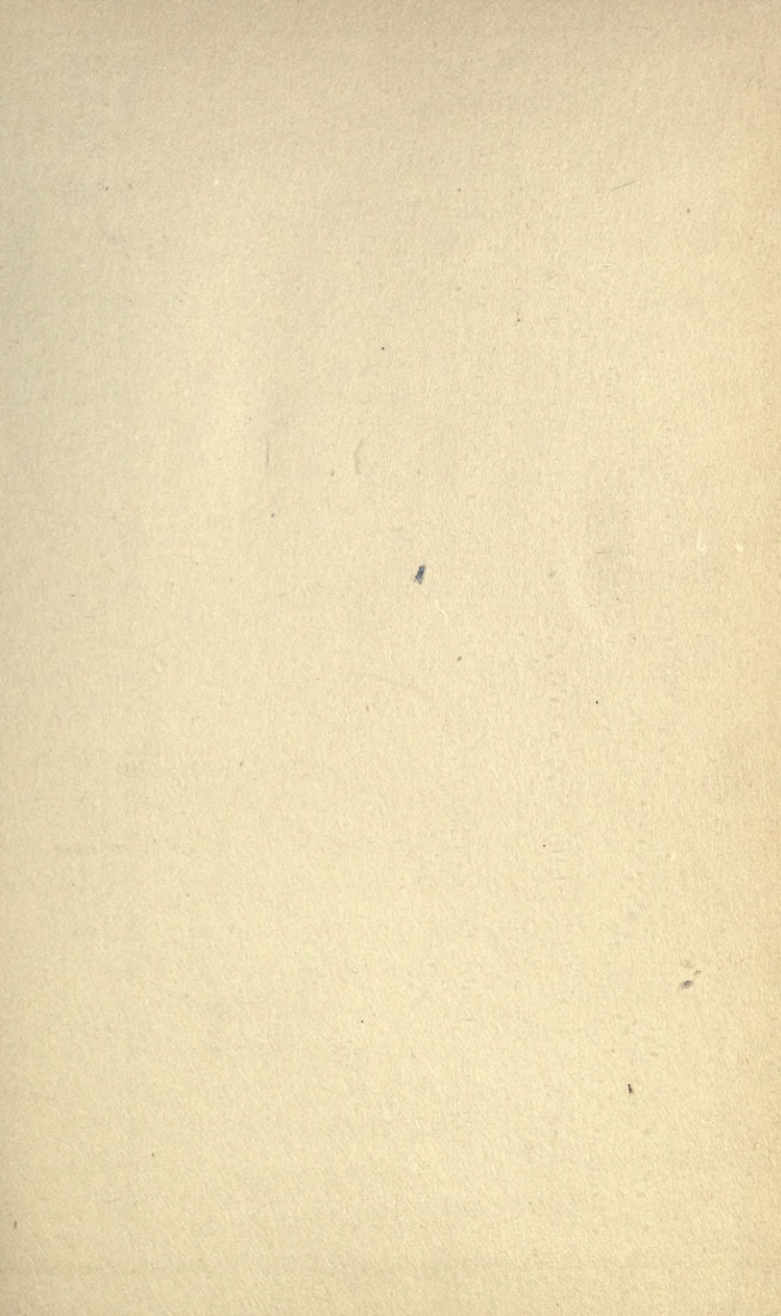
LÉON de TINSEAU

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FRANK ALVAH DEARBORN

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MADAME DE LA GUERNERIE SWAYED LIKE AN APPARITION.

# THE DECISION

From the French of  
LÉON DE TINSEAU

Translated by  
FRANK ALVAH DEARBORN



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*The Decision*

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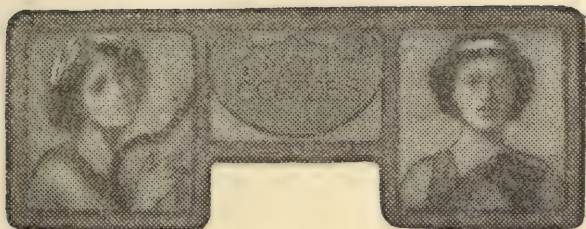
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# THE DECISION

## I

### PAUL CHOOSES A MILITARY CAREER

Tarragnoz the painter was among his colleagues a sort of favorite. His style, although neither obscure nor inaccessible, brought him fame and fortune, for the public of forty years ago had never accepted the standard now required that art be difficult. He sold his pictures at high prices, quickly became

well known, if not illustrious, and saved money without being penurious. Finally, he had the opportunity to marry, not his model, as might be supposed, but a poor orphan of the best social standing; a girl of splendid mind with just enough Bohemian tint to amuse the men of the world without causing the comment "*sale bourgeois*" from the painter's associates.

Their married life was brief, for the young husband soon died and the wife who adored him did not long survive. As for their son, then six years of age, it is impossible even with the best of intentions to pretend that fortune favored him during the early years of his life. His paternal uncle, who imagined himself to be something of an invalid,

took charge of the orphan, who fortunately was not poor, and placed him in a first-class school. Here young Paul worked just enough to keep up with the average minds, except in the class of design. There, from the first day, he held and never left the foot of the class.

Vainly his anxious master tried to stimulate his pride by holding before his eyes the moral obligation to be a good painter which rested upon the son of the famous Tarragnoz.

Pushed to the limit, this rebel against atavism, who was then fourteen years old, declared that he detested painting.

“First, the smell is too bad and, besides, I do not wish to be like my father, who arose with the servants and half

the time came to dinner only after we had eaten a course or two."

"But, my friend, when one bears the name Tarragnoz!"

"When one bears the name of Tarragnoz one ought not to make bad pictures. Rest assured, sir, I shall not do it."

"Then," prophesied the master, "you will be another example of idleness dissipating a fortune acquired by work."

Becoming more and more serious and with a slight movement of the head which indicated a firm decision, young Paul responded:

"No, I shall enter Saint-Cyr. At least if I am retired before having passed the grade of captain no one will

refer to the military glories of my family."

It was easy to see that, although he might never become a painter, he promised to be a good logician and he already showed a tendency to personalities which caused his comrades to apply to him the unjust epithet of "Snob." He was not a snob, but he possessed an independence of mind which was carried a little too far. Given a situation in which another person would feel himself obliged to do a certain thing by commonplace conventionality, his first thought would be not to do the obvious thing.

Although he failed to appreciate it, this love for unbeaten paths in a large measure saved him from the danger of

bad examples. Weak men very often walk irregularly through fear of being considered singular if they walk straight. The opposite sentiment in young Tarragnoz on many occasions took the place of religious principles that he lacked; for his only moral equipment was what he had been able to absorb in two hours of *Ethics* each week. And he had neither father nor mother to serve him as private teachers.

At eighteen he was admitted to Saint-Cyr as he had announced. At the same time his guardian, an old bachelor absorbed by his pills and powders and fancied stomach trouble, gave him his freedom and rendered his accounts. He could only predict that the young man was going to ruin himself, if not during

the sojourn at the school, at least soon after leaving.

“Why?” asked Paul.

“Because,” responded the prophet, “a young man in your situation always ruins himself.”

“Oh! not always,” said he with a little mockery in his eyes.

Already skeptical, he divined that prophets always count upon aiding the accomplishment of their prophecy.

However, it is impossible to conceal the fact that his thirty thousand pounds of securities had been nearly reduced to twenty when his second gold band was sewed upon his sleeve. But, in fact, this was not his ruin. Besides he had to his credit a great capital of experience, for “boosted” by the name of his father he

had obtained the city of Paris as his first garrison.

After having believed that he had known the world in the balls of the Academy and other similar affairs during the time at the Military School, Tarragnoz was now able to understand it fully. This young man was not handsome, thank heaven, but he was robust, well proportioned, elegantly formed and with one of those unusual physiognomies which make one ask, "Who is he?" If he did not possess, or did not cultivate the journalistic mind which many women prefer, he had that indescribable personal perception generally known as *sense of humor*.

This natural gift gave him acuteness and penetration which was pleasing to

refined persons. He always avoided making wounds which would take long to heal. The process of healing seemed to him tiresome as well as painful, because it was always the same. In fact, everything was "always the same" in the life of the Parisian world, and this was a favorite theme of his conversation.

"In the year of the agricultural laborer," said he, "I do not find more monotony or less of the unexpected than in ours. He sows, he sees his grain shoot up, making green the plains and forming itself into heads of corn, he watches the straw become yellow. He cuts, he packs his harvest and takes it to the market; then he commences over again. We ourselves have the season of

dinners, the season of collections for the poor, the horse show where awaken the great passions destined to ripen after Easter. Then comes the Salon, then the dog show, then Auteuil, then Longchamp, then the springs or the seashore, then the hunting, then the return to Paris which does not even have the advantage of reuniting persons who have been separated. The Parisian in his horror of change decides to go to Switzerland, to the Pyrenees or to Trouville, according as it is certain 'that everyone will be there.' "

"Where are you going?" he was asked on a certain day when projects for the summer were being considered.

"I shall go to Algeria, eight hundred kilometres south of Oran."

The strangest thing was that he was not joking. His orderly had already packed his trunks. Promoted to a lieutenancy, he received, by virtue of the same "pull" which had secured for him Paris for his *début*, a place in the Foreign Legion.

In this world, that is to say, in some square centimetres of the "world" which form the special enclosure of a Parisian, this departure was the subject of much talk. Some declared that he was insane, others that he was ruined, others that he was hopelessly in love. Among this number, one pretty woman, who had resisted his somewhat mild attacks, greatly wished to believe herself responsible for the damage. In a few written words, which might mean much

or nothing, she cast a ray of hope upon the battlefield too quickly abandoned. But Tarragnoz, who had not *understood*, drew himself out of the affair by a little confidence of two pages:

Can it be true, dear Madame, that on your reception day, when it was impossible for me to appear, they really wished to talk of me and, after what you said, to search for the key to the mystery? If, as I very much doubt, they mention it again next Thursday, be good enough to say to your friends that I am the least mysterious of men. I assure you that I greatly regret it, for it would be worth more than to be what I am, that is to say, an infant too advanced for his years, bored by the frightful monotony which is the result of civilization. For a society tires itself more in proportion as it becomes more civilized—an unavoidable thing since the end of civilization is to suppress as much as possible the unexpected.

Before the deluge, man, always exposed to the unlooked-for unpleasant meeting with two

rows of flesh-eaters, never found the hours too long, be sure of that.

Ten or twenty thousand years later our ladies of the manor were unacquainted with ennui. Every morning on arising they might hear that the invested dungeon was about to be assaulted and that—without mentioning pillage and fire—the most detestable surprise menaced their charms.

The most trivial visit in the neighborhood exposed them to the danger of being swallowed up in the flood, held in ransom by the marauders or abducted by some unscrupulous lover. Were they able to say if the husbands started for the hunt that they would not be stifled by the bears or disemboweled by the aurochs? If inclined to be flirtatious, was there not always the chance in sitting at table of hearing at dessert this indigestible communication: “Madame, you have eaten the heart of your lover!”

Civilization has suppressed all imagination, particularly in the matter of conjugal reprisals.

I, dear Madame, shudder at the thought that until my hair is white I shall say, hear said, do and order the same things, with the difference of a little more gold upon my sleeve.

The distractions of a war are less and less probable in our civilized military system.

So, then, I am going into the desert to command soldiers who for the most part hide their true name; and I go to fight with the jovial fellows who still cut off the heads of the wounded when time lacks for something worse. In other words, I am trying a cure of *savagery*; that is the whole mystery. Some years of this *régime* will probably suffice to make me find delightful that which is monotonous and, more delightful still, she who is adorable. You know, Madame, of whom I wish to speak. If you do not know, your hands which I kiss for a long time will be able to tell you.

TARRAGNOZ.

## II

### ON THE FRONTIER OF MOROCCO

Two months later Paul opened his eyes at the reveille in a small zinc house in one of the most advanced posts of South Oranis. With regard to the sought-for surprises, this garrison, in the midst of the desert to which it had arrived by dangerous marches of three weeks' duration, left nothing for even the most exacting to desire. But the troupe which he had under his orders, a company detached from a regiment of the Foreign Legion, departed from its usual routine more often than the garrison.

In the first place, that which chiefly distinguishes this troupe is its manner of recruitment; one knows of them only after they are enlisted. By a derogation of the laws of all military organization they require of the man presenting himself the single condition that he be able-bodied; no matter if his hair is growing gray and he is unable to speak a word of French. From where he comes, or why he comes, or what deceptions or remorse fill his past life, no one demands of him. He enlists under any name whatever, true or false. The true name sometimes has suddenly disappeared from the lists of our regular army.

There, side by side with the Alsatian deserter whom we ought to salute pro-

foundly, one finds the gay fellows who have deserted morality in all countries, even in ours. That concerns only themselves and their Creator. To change the name was perhaps for them a necessity; perhaps, also, the greatest and last sign of respect which they owed to their family.

One may judge that there was no lack of the unexpected among soldiers recruited in this fashion. But that which attracted the young lieutenant, in view of his own natural bravery, was the evident contempt for life shown by his men in the course of engagements, somewhat rare in the neighborhood of such a frontier. The astonishing thing was that these expatriots, who seemed to have renounced their country, remembered it

in the moments of effort and peril. Sometimes in a charge one would hear a soldier cry out to himself, "*Vive l'Italie!*" or "*Vive la Belgique!*" sometimes even "*Vive l'Allemagne!*" and in the animation of their courage an ardent national rivalry made them warriors in the true sense of the word.

That their ignorance of discipline was as complete as their ignorance of danger was something the new lieutenant was not long in perceiving.

"My dear fellow," said his captain to him, "get it into your head that we are not in the barracks of la Pépinière here, nor at the grand manœuvres. Do not have too sharp an eye or too fine ears, or you will have an excellent chance of not dying of old age. These devils have

not come here for their health nor for yours, and sometimes their guns 'scatter'."

"Thanks, captain, but neither have I come to this paradise to improve my complexion."

"You may be sure the men know that. The single fact that a young man of family, with the appearance of prosperity and without a queer history has exchanged Paris for the Legion has already gained their esteem. At the right time you will see that they will cheerfully risk their skins one for the other, chiefs or soldiers."

Captain Mataillet attached himself very quickly to his lieutenant, whom he overwhelmed with his confidences, even with his confessions. He had come up

from the ranks, had always served in Algeria, and many times had got himself in a bad pickle "on account of that damned rascal absinthe." He talked of that fatal liquor about the same as he would have spoken of a living creature, full of artifice, persistently lying in wait to do injury after the fashion of the Moroccans.

Fortunately, in going south, the danger of the former diminished as much as the latter increased, as there were no cafés in that far off region.

"If only we could find the wells," added he.

When he talked of the Moroccans, one would have thought he was hearing a City police officer speaking of the Apaches. For him "*ces bougres la*"

were not citizens of a country jealous of its independence, but detestable vagabonds, thinking only of doing injury, capable of every atrocity, and face to face with whom extermination was the only commendable proceeding.

“In fact,” concluded he, “if the scoundrels are not obstructed, perhaps I shall have my ear slit before my fourth galloon.” Whenever they were together, Paul never heard him speak of any other subject.

Among the lower officers, Tarragnoz had from the first noticed his sergeant. This man was a Swiss named Walter, who, unlike his captain, was able to talk upon all subjects, although he displayed a certain caution if one approached the chapter of his personal recollections.

His age, as often happens to certain women, seemed to vary under the influence of the hour, of his impressions, or, more probably, of the return to his thoughts of painful periods of his past life. After a day of inaction, when the evening arrived, he would have upon his forehead and at the corners of his mouth such wrinkles as would make him appear to be forty. The following day he would seem to be not over twenty, if they started him out early in the morning to search the neighboring gorges and chase the sheep-stealers, who so quickly could change to assassins. Under the fire of the long guns, Walter shouldered his carbine with the coolness of a man shooting pigeons at Monte Carlo. His chief at first believed him to be fond of

danger as of sport, but he soon had a suspicion that this blond, with the blue eyes, fine hands and caressing voice, sought in battle some things besides the agitation of his nerves. After a rather bad skirmish he felt that it was his duty to admonish him.

“I don’t know whether you are tired of life, but you ought to think of others who might look at the matter differently. In such a war as we are carrying on, it happens that a wounded man costs two or three times as much as a dead one, because it is impossible to leave him in the hands of an enemy whose habits you know.”

“If I am wounded it will cost the government only a single cartridge. Many

of my comrades have promised to shoot me if they see the Moroccans come to take me."

"I," said Tarragnoz, "promise you another thing. I will blow out the brains of anyone who commits a crime like that. You will do well to warn your comrades."

"But, lieutenant, they have promised to do this at my request. Your ideas will change upon this subject—and also upon others."

"Decidedly," thought Paul, "the brave Mataillet is right, we are not in the barracks of la Pépinière."

"Let us see," said some one in a loud voice, "do you believe that a man has the right to dispose coolly of his life in advance, as a paper which one orders

destroyed, so it shall not fall into indiscreet hands?"

"Hold on," said Walter, laughing, "one would say it is the 'parson' speaking."

Contrary to what one might expect, the personage thus designated did not wear a gown (to see one you would have to travel far), but the velvet-trimmed uniform of a military doctor. It is necessary to present with some care this original of a type which one unfortunately rarely meets. Rudolph Tucheim, instead of waiting to become a hero of romance, satisfied himself with being a real hero all the time; a hero with big spectacles, with a back bent by study and with a strong accent. Many acts of bravery had gained for him the Cross.

Born at Strasbourg during the siege, remaining French through his passion for Alsace, he had joined the Legion in order to care for "his dear Alsatians." He was for them a sort of lay chaplain, knowing their history, possessing their secrets, hiding in his cantine their letters to be sent off the day after a battle, letters which would sadden the old mother who had given her milk to the lost one, and the young woman who had given him her heart.

The thing which rendered Tucheim worthy of his ecclesiastical nickname will be in the eyes of the readers a supreme trait of originality; this military doctor was a confirmed Catholic. In the Legion no one thought of blaming him or laughing at him. Paul Tarrag-

noz, a free thinker of the most liberal type, refrained from doing either, but he was courteously astonished at one of their first conversations.

“I do not believe,” said he, “that I have ever met a doctor who admitted the supernatural. In justice, I ought to say that I have but little resorted to your colleagues, as is usually the case with men who are in good health.”

Tuchheim did not willingly enter into a discussion upon an infrequent subject to please the interlocutor, but judging that with the lieutenant one might be able to approach the metaphysical domain, he responded:

“Doctors do not willingly admit the supernatural for the same reason which prevents you military men from admir-

ing diplomacy. You have been taught that there is but one force in the world, the arm which kills the body. We are taught to prostrate ourselves before science, represented as all powerful and unique to save. In that posture, less fatiguing than it appears, many doctors remain all their lives; others, neither more stupid nor less courageous, raise the head, look above them and arrive at this double conclusion. First, the animal creation is not the most important part of the human composition; next, science, in spite of the marvelous treasures which she offers us, is summoned each morning before the tribunal of failures by a disappointed patient."

"*Mazette!* If you ever sustain that thesis in a congress of doctors, please

give me notice that I may hasten to prevent them from knocking you down. Have you ever heard of *Christian Science* which abolishes the remedies and replaces them by prayer? Ah, well, my friend, you coast very near that disastrous heresy."

"Not at all. On the contrary, I do not wrong the doctors. There are some who narrow their empire and curtail the dispensatory in refusing to prescribe certain remedies which are particularly efficacious. Perhaps you have been present at a consultation with one of our masters. He arrives, he handles and turns over the sick body. His science, admirably infallible, examines the tissues, muscles and viscera in order to discover their weakness or malignity.

The thermometer, pulsometer, stethoscope and microscope search the poor animal in danger of death. 'What is your age, your ordinary *régime*, the food taken last evening, the precaution neglected, the excess committed? Of what did your relatives die?' "

"If you please," said Tarragnoz, "cut it short. Already I feel ill."

"Have no fear. The materialistic scholar will not go further. He leaves his patient forgetting to search the soul, the mistress of the body; often its executioner, always its accomplice. He is not concerned in knowing if that soul suffers, in cheering its solitude, in listening to its complaints, its fears, its childish caprices or its senile whims. Denying the existence of the soul, or

disdaining its aid, he signs a beautiful prescription and starts for the other sick ones."

"He will not see many during the day," objected the lieutenant, "if he is obliged to follow the system which you indicate. Good-bye to fat bank accounts. Or, indeed, it may be necessary to have two prices, with or without the supernatural, at the choice of the patient."

"I give up convincing you," sighed Tucheim, "you do not take seriously either religion or medicine. Let us see. Is it true that you are an atheist?"

"No. I believe in God as much as the Pope. But if it is necessary to recite to you my Pater——"

"What was your age when your mother died?"

“I scarcely knew her.”

“It is indeed as I thought. I still have mine, and she is a saint.”

“Then it is true that you go to confession?”

“Sometimes, when I am not at the extremity of the desert. If you knew how good it is in certain cases.”

### III

#### SERGEANT WALTER

The Parisians had soon forgotten Tarragnoz. To the friends of his father he was a fugitive; to his comrades he was a hot-headed individual; to the world in general he was a savage; to his special circle, not having his name upon their lists, he was a pariah, purely and simply ignored. Some old women desirous of always being familiar with scandal, kept in good order the legend by which "the poor boy" or "that imbecile," according to the humor of the moment, had gone out of his senses on account of the baroness.

That woman, not only was not ignorant of the legend (inasmuch as she had created it), but she also found it advisable to keep it up by means of an epistolary intercourse with her pretended victim. The letters of Tarragnoz procured for her two advantages: First, that of being able to exhibit them as convincing documents; next—as they found out later—that of drawing from them the materials for a romance which she had in her head to write. By the way, she might have had them printed without displacing a line, for they compromised neither the past nor the present. In this correspondence with a *Parisienne*, who was rather handsome and passably intelligent, the exile found a welcome distraction in the desert of

South-Oranis. To Walter, entirely *Helvetian* that he was, certain passages from the letters communicated to him by the lieutenant appeared to be an incomparable treat. However, he did not restrain himself at times from making fun of the horribly "blue-stocking" style of the baroness.

"I must admit that is somewhat my fault," responded Tarragnoz one day. "I like to incite her emulation by assuming the style of these women."

The sergeant, to tell the truth, was not often in a position to act as judge, for the very good reason that in the letters exchanged he himself played an important rôle. His chief presented him in these terms:

I have under my orders, as non-commissioned officer, a superb young man who has the profile of a grand lord, the hands of a duchess and the education of a gentleman (which he does his best to conceal). You would be horribly in love with him at the end of a week were you to come here; happily you are not coming. As for me, I am fast becoming his friend.

You are saying this is already too much, since there is no proof that I could safely trust him with my watch, though both came from Geneva. Was it a desire for pleasure and curiosity, as in my case, that brought Walter to the Legion? You would not believe me if I affirmed it. Why he came is one of the things we do not know. To ask a *légionnaire* his history is nearly as bad as asking a beautiful, well-preserved woman her age—one is able to risk this comparison in the face of your twenty years.

Five or six weeks later another letter showed but little change in the situation:

I am indeed nearly making an intimate of my friend, contrary to all good sense and in vio-

lation of the rules of military etiquette. But if you had seen him fight yesterday! Naturally it was an insignificant battle, although we lost some of our men. Walter is a hero. So much the worse if he has more or less peccadillos upon his conscience! And then, as a conversationalist, he fits me like a glove.

In the evening, when all is quiet, he comes to my small zinc house. By permission, given once for all times, he seats himself when we are alone, takes a cigarette and if he finds a month-old newspaper upon the table he seizes it with feverish eagerness. To note one detail, he neglects the first page and runs quickly to the "worldly echoes" and devours them without saying a word and with his forehead creased by a large wrinkle. That he has lived more or less in Paris and frequented our society does not admit of a doubt; but that does not render the mystery more assuring. Sometimes his reading causes him to raise his shoulders or even to utter an impatient oath, for he poses a little as a philosopher disgusted with the world. Usually he prudently sticks to generalities, but sometimes he forgets himself. The other day, while greatly animated, he mumbled a continuous stream.

“Nothing to feed a horse with formerly, but now they crush the world with their automobile. Where the devil do they find the money! Poor fool! She has found the time to discover that her husband makes fun of her, but if the happy rivals are summoned as witnesses, how they will laugh. . . . The fashionable tenor! What a bluff! . . . Finally they are invited to Bonnelles!”

Walter certainly knows the persons whom we know. I have set traps for him, but he always escapes in time. Our politics interest him but little and our enthusiasm still less. He declares that the Swiss Republic puts ours to shame and that I appear to have an exaggerated patriotism. It is often past midnight when he leaves my officer's zinc for his subaltern's canvas. One single subject seems to be interdicted in his conversation: he never speaks of women, which leads to the belief that he regrets one in particular. And yet I doubt it. “Are you a Puritan after the example of our doctor?” I asked him. “Oh, you know everyone is a little Puritan in Geneva,” he replied.

There, dear baroness, is the unlooked-for social affair. I do not speak of my military sur-

prises, of the crack of the guns causing a hasty rising, of the suspicious cavaliers appearing upon the crests whom it is necessary to scrutinize closely, of the tardy convoy which makes doubtful the supply of bread for the following day and risks condemning us to dry mutton. Truly, I am greatly amused, but what would become of me without that other *cavalier douteux*, my friend Walter?

Already, however, Tarragnoz knew the suffering of jealousy in his friendship, for the sergeant had another friend in the person of Doctor Tucheim. Between these two the meetings were much less frequent, but more intimate. Probably they were more confidential. To Walter, according to all the evidence, the "parson" was the friend of bad days. When the company remained for some weeks without making an expedition and without the firing of a

gun, the under-officer became sad and used to have a troubled and pathetic expression. At evening, instead of seeking the company of his chief, he wandered like a soul in pain around the camp. Then by chance Tucheim would find him there and take him by the arm and lead him to his quarters adjoining the infirmary, and no one knows of what they talked during the next hour. Although this slyness displeased Tarragnoz, neither Tucheim nor Walter made allusion to their mysterious talks, from which Walter invariably came calmer and more disposed to talkativeness with his lieutenant. For this, Tarragnoz was indirectly under obligation to the doctor. But the moment came when he was obliged to request the doctor's profes-

sional assistance. One morning he was taken with unbearable hepatic pains.

"Is this the first time?" asked Tucheim, who was called in the middle of the night.

"It is the first time for many years."

"Hum! *Aïn-Sefra* is but little recommended for afflictions of that kind. The only thing which will relieve you is an injection of morphine. Hold your arm."

Some days later, the trouble having disappeared, Tarragnoz said to Tucheim: "If a crisis returns when you are visiting an advanced post fifty kilometres away, I am going to amuse myself. In my cantine I have found a syringe formerly used by someone. Do me the favor to leave me a little mor-

phine and if necessary I shall be able to pull myself out of the trouble alone."

Tuchheim reflected, scratched his head and then made this reservation: "You must give me a promise, lieutenant, that Walter never knows you possess that infernal drug."

"Why?"

"Because he will steal it from you. He has a syringe himself. One should always be on guard against a morphin-omac, even after a pretended cure."

"You believe, then, that your friend is capable of larceny?"

"To steal money, no. To steal morphine—perhaps. I have your promise, have I not?"

## IV

### THE COUP DE GRÂCE

The writer of these pages (one should be grateful to him for his modesty) is not attempting to follow in the footsteps of Homer, who *à propos* of a simple adventure of a wife, a husband and a lover found material for the *Iliad*. The telegraph, with or without wires in these later days, has composed bulky volumes in bad but truthful prose upon the exploits of the Foreign Legion without forgetting the other cohorts who battled at its side. In every language of the world the papers have re-

counted the gallantry of the survivors and honored the *mânes* of those who fell. What were the battles upon the plains of Troy compared with these endless marches in the mountains, with the encounters where the cannon thundered, where the balls whistled, where death came from far away, invisible, inevitable, even for the combatant who possessed the buckler of Achilles! This recital does not pretend to be and there is no occasion for its being a glorification of the heroes whom everyone admires.

Besides, at the time when the real war with Morocco commenced, Tarragonoz and Tucheim were no longer in South-Oranis. Sergeant Walter is yet there, even as the god-like Achilles is

yet upon the sandy shores of Scamandre, under the tall hillock of sand which the traveller loves to contemplate. Of the poor *cavalier douteux*, like so many other men, what remains of him? Not even a knoll of grass, a luxury unknown in the desert.

Let no one imagine, however, that the personages in this history led peaceful existences. They had already known long expeditions in "the country of thirst" under a sky of fire, ambuscades in the mountains favorably located for treachery, the escorts of the convoys watched for by a famished tribe, the predatory incursions of flocks defended with a furious hatred. On more than one occasion the "parson" sent off the heavy envelopes bearing upon the ad-

dress names that no one had ever heard among the men of the detachment.

One day a little before noon Captain Mataillet, Lieutenant Tarragnoz and Sergeant Walter were presently talking upon the top of a hill from which the captain was searching the horizon with his field-glasses. It was the day for the arrival of the mail, fresh flour, juicy preserves and new cartridges. Doctor Tucheim, starting the evening before to visit a distant post had said, "If I can find some tobacco here tomorrow on my return, I sha'n't care about the other things."

A cloud of dust arose in the distance. The mouth of Captain Mataillet formed a grimace beneath the field-glasses.

"A trooper galloping," said he.

“Surely there is something doing. Lieutenant, get a section ready. If that fellow is hurrying so much just to bring me some vegetables I shall, indeed, be surprised.”

There was, in fact, something doing. Ten kilometres off the convoy had been attacked, and although the small escort had held firm, the chief desired reinforcements. Twenty men, ten of whom were mounted, started at once under the charge of Tarragnoz and Walter. They went at a race-horse speed. At each kilometre the horsemen gave up their mounts to the foot soldiers. One hour sufficed to bring the little group to the place of the engagement.

Previously taught by the *Spahi*, Tarragnoz now understood the situation.

The ambushade, located a little distance from the post, had succeeded in deceiving the chief of the convoy into the belief that he had passed the dangerous zone. Before daylight the marauders had leaped over the very uncertain line of the frontier at a point a short distance away, and had been able to hide themselves behind the rocks upon the west slope of the little waterless valley. All at once they bounded out like cats, formed themselves into two groups, and their firing burst out in front and in the rear of the column. Fortunately, our friends in Berlin had never had time to arm these marauders in European fashion, so they were unable to preserve their natural shelter and open fire at a distance. Our men very quick-

ly formed into a square and decimated the enemy by a rapid fire, while the long guns of the Moroccans did but little damage; the affair would have ended badly, however, had it not been for the self-sacrifice of the mounted trooper and the good fortune which saved both him and his horse from being shot.

Tarragnoz, with perfect coolness, thought best to occupy the heights which the enemy had just abandoned and which, besides its advantageous position, cut off the retreat of their assailants. When the carbines commenced to speak behind them, the Moroccans understood the danger and seeing that they were confronted with only a few men sought bravely to force a passage; but they had never had occasion to learn

what hardened men, properly armed, could accomplish. Soon the slope was strewn with their corpses.

Walter, standing near the officers, seemed to be greatly amused. He fired like an amateur, leisurely shouldering his gun and announcing the shots.

“Take the one, lieutenant, who is preparing to jump the crevice; two to one you will bring him down.”

The man fell; then it was another’s turn.

“No, that one is too easy,” said Walter, who, except on rare occasions, let fly at once.

“My compliments,” said Tarragnoz to him, “you shoot like a Swiss.”

“Is it not so, lieutenant? Like a

Swiss, like William Tell. Ah! the swine!"

He carried his hand to his right side, his face contracted by a sharp pain. He leaned upon his gun to save himself from falling. His chief asked him, "Are you seriously hurt?"

"I do not think so. There is nothing broken. I can move my leg."

"Then we must not remain here where we are too much exposed." But already the assailants had seen them.

Shouting their cries of joy, which resembled the roar of a beast, the marauders hurled themselves in the direction of the wounded man. Still standing, Walter fired a last shot. A Moroccan fell, but five or six others were approaching.

“Lieutenant,” groaned Walter, “excuse me, I am too ill to hold my gun.”

“It is no longer a gun that is needed, my brave fellow. But let us try to gain that shelter where I can defend you better.”

Seeing that the wounded man walked with pain, Tarragnoz took him in his arms. Soon escaping from the whizzing bullets, they reached a projecting rock. In one hand the officer held his own revolver and in the other that of the sergeant. When the demons were within ten paces he opened fire.

“Save your last two balls for ourselves,” cried Walter to him.

“No need of that yet; without being a Swiss, my aim is passable, besides here are our men.”

At this moment, the Moroccans, disconcerted by the effect of our arms, thought only of saving themselves and this they were able to do, thanks to the diversion caused by the wounding of the sergeant. Supported by two comrades Walter was able to reach the convoy. Upon the back of a mule they placed the wounded man, whose pains were terrible.

"You do not bleed, it will amount to nothing," they said to him.

"I would like it better if I bled like a calf," responded he, with his teeth tightly shut, "and I shall have two hours of it before getting to camp."

Soon they were obliged to take him down from the mule, as the shaking caused him such frightful torture. He

remained lying upon the ground guarded by some of the men.

“I will return as soon as possible with a stretcher,” said his lieutenant, “and I hope the doctor will have returned from his inspection.”

Tarragnoz returned with the stretcher, but without the doctor, to whom he had dispatched a messenger to hasten his return.

The wounded man during the journey could not remain quiet. His right leg, bent back, kept beating the air like a wing, sometimes falling upon the other thigh, sometimes carried outside by a nearly continuous rotary movement. He was in the infirmary three hours before the doctor arrived. After the examination and first dressing of

the wound, Tucheim made his report to his chief.

“Wound on the right side of the abdomen. The projectile after having crossed the *psoas* muscle was deviated upon the *iliac* bone. The severe pain makes an investigation extremely difficult. Unfortunately, five or six hours passed before the first aid was given to him. It is reasonable to expect an infection of the wound to the *traumatic psoitis* with intense fever——”

“To the devil with your Hebrew words,” interrupted Mataillet. “In plain language, you mean that the poor fellow has a bullet in his belly. Are you going to extract it?”

The doctor turned his eyes and responded, “Not immediately.”

“What? It is outrageous to leave him so, if you are thinking of doing it,” said the captain.

“I do it for the reason that we are in the middle of the desert, without a hospital, without ice and with one hundred and thirteen degrees of heat in the shade. How do you think I can prevent the infection of the wound and struggle with the fever?”

“That’s just my luck! The best sergeant of my company! Ah! The dirty scoundrels! Say, lieutenant, I hope they killed a bunch of them.”

“Poor Walter alone killed a number,” affirmed Tarragnoz. “This evening we shall have a correct account.”

He forgot to speak of the work which he had himself accomplished in pre-

venting the enemy from beheading his friend, and he asked himself the question, "Was it really a service that I rendered him?"

Tuchheim regained the infirmary accompanied by the lieutenant. At the door he requested the latter not to enter.

"I would like to talk five minutes with Walter. To-morrow probably it will be difficult."

Upon leaving the wounded man he went to the zinc house of Tarragnoz.

"Walter requested me to inform his family of the engagement of this morning in order that they may know that he fell while doing his duty. Any notes that you can furnish will be useful."

"You shall have them," promised the

lieutenant, "and you can write to his family that he fell like a hero. But I fear it is now that he will have need of all his heroism. From here we can hear his cries. It is frightful."

The sick and wounded men lying in the infirmary were unable to secure a moment's sleep during the night. In the morning Tucheim requested that they furnish him with a special tent to which he could carry the wounded sergeant.

"That is useless, bring him to my house," commanded the lieutenant.

The doctor objected. "You don't know what awaits you. The unfortunate man will have, until death relieves him, terrible tortures which may continue many days."

“All the more reason. In my house he will be better off than with a simple canvas between him and the sun.”

A half hour later Walter was lying in the clean bed of Tarragnoz. At this moment of the recital, the most realistic writer would have no need of exaggerating the description of the horrible drama, but the narrator is not ashamed to avow that he lacks the courage. As for Tarragnoz, the torture endured for three days and nights, greatly exceeded that which he was prepared to suffer. In a dismal crescendo the complaints became cries, then howlings of pain to such a degree that within the inclosure of the camp not a man was able to close an eye.

Tarragnoz had nothing before his eyes now, except an unfortunate monster disfigured by torture. It was with difficulty that he realized that this strange object was his friend Walter. The face, which had become black and blue, made him think of the space reserved upon the canvas by a painter who has indicated only by dark lines the face of his model. Under their distended arches no trace of the eyelids remained, yet the eyes burned with a sinister lustre, contracting themselves and seeming about to disappear in the depths of their orbits. This gave one the impression of the two lights on the rear of a train entering a tunnel, soon to be absorbed in the darkness.

The twisted arms convulsively beat the air, the hands contracted like the fangs of an animal, and without ceasing and with the accurate regularity of a balanced machine, the folded leg resembling the pinion of an enormous bird, described that movement of rotation, which, more than anything else, drove Tarragnoz half crazy.

Injections of morphine, given often during the twenty-four hours, alleviated in some degree the unfortunate man's suffering, but the quieting effect did not last. Then the cries became hoarse like the barks of a dog that sees its game, and but one word of supplication could be distinguished.

“Morphine! Morphine!”

Unable to contain himself longer,

Tarragnoz ran to the doctor's house.

"For the love of Heaven, come to him and make a puncture."

"Not yet, it is but a half hour since the last one."

On the morning of the third day, the lieutenant insisted, "What if it is only a half hour since the last one? What does that matter?"

"Lieutenant, I do not want to kill him."

"My God, why not?"

"Because human life does not belong to us."

"You admit, however, that there is no hope."

"Not the least."

"And you are going to allow him to suffer?"

*“Non Occides!* Thou shalt not kill! You know what is commanded.”

“Your religion is without bowels of compassion.”

“Do not accuse my religion. I am a doctor. The most atheistic of us would refuse to do what you ask.”

Returning to the wounded man, Tarragnoz, from what followed, might well have believed that his conversation with Tucheim had been heard.

“My—lieutenant, kill me,—please kill me,—kill me!”

Then this appeal became continuous, sometimes murmured like a prayer, sometimes hurled with imprecations, and during that day Tarragnoz heard nothing else. To his astonishment Walter no longer asked for morphine.

“Lieutenant,—you have a revolver,—kill me,—please kill me,—kill me, you coward,—how I would like to see you in my place!”

For Tarragnoz this ordeal, supported during the days of agony and the long nights of insomnia, was dangerous, for the officer admitted no other guide than reason in the maze of human vicissitudes. He interrogated his conscience. He pictured to himself Walter condemned to death and himself commandant of the platoon of execution. Would it not be his duty to give the order to fire? And when the condemned man would be brought to earth a corporal would approach and give him the *coup de grâce*. All that would be legitimate. Would the *coup de grâce* demanded by

this suffering and dying man be less legitimate? The conscience of Tarragonoz—at least he so believed—told him that during all his future life he would never again have the opportunity to accomplish such a deed of mercy. And before him, before *them*, another night approached with the visions of a frightful hell.

His resolution was not fully formed, but he wished to prepare himself for whatever might happen. In any event it was not a question of a revolver.

“After all, I am not obliged to do anything,” thought he.

Crafty as a malefactor, he entered the house of Tucheim.

“Doctor, I do not feel well.”

“My poor lieutenant, what is the matter? Where do you suffer?”

“In the liver. I feel an attack coming on and I have no morphine to relieve me of the colic. Here is my flask, will you refill it?”

“I am short myself,” responded the doctor, “poor Walter has consumed so much, but I will prepare some. Leave your flask, you shall have it in an hour.”

That night Tarragnoz alone watched with his sergeant. When his watch marked the hour of midnight, the wounded man still crying, “Kill me! kill me! What wrong have I done that you let me suffer?” Tarragnoz approached the bed. “Do you really wish it, do you really want to die?”

“Only lend me your revolver.”

“No, I have morphine. You will fall asleep after three injections, stroke by stroke.”

“Thanks, my lieutenant. Ah! It is not too soon—give me your hand.”

The trembling fingers rested a second in the convulsed claws of Walter. Then Tarragnoz filled the syringe and pushed the needle. He gave one injection, then a second, then a third; after which he put everything back in order as if he had been a vulgar assassin. Already feeling that he would not have the courage to do the thing over again, he awaited the end of the drama, whose *dénouement* he had brought about. The cries of pain continued louder than before, but he had heard that a too

strong dose does not instantly take effect.

“More!” cried Walter, “I feel *that* coming, but not quickly enough—more—more, lieutenant.”

Paul at once felt his reason, usually so affirmative, stealing away in the face of an accomplished fact. Already he was on the point of running to the house of the “parson” and confessing what he had done. All at once the cries became less frequent, less heart-rending, and after so many days and so many nights of uproar, the effect was like a profound silence. The man who had caused this silence bowed his head, not daring to turn toward the bed where *something* still remained. The gripping of two hands upon the shoulders

made him start; he looked and shuddered. Walter was there, his body half out of the bed coverings. He was there with his face disfigured by the gaping holes of the eyes already dead. Once seen, this frightful mask could never be forgotten. The mouth opened with a movement which did not resemble that of a mouth which speaks. Yet, however, these words came out, "*If you knew.*"

That which Tarragnoz ought to know will never be known, either to him or to any other person. The weight which he supported became heavier and the embrace tighter. Then the fearless soldier for the first time knew what terror was. He wanted to fly but in his movement he carried with him the body of Wal-

ter, which rolled upon the ground and did not move. The hour of deliverance had come.

Paul stooped, but was obliged to put forth desperate efforts in order to place upon the funeral bed the man whom he had carried like a child some days before, while the Moroccans' balls whistled in their ears.

Those who have held in their arms a corpse know how heavy death makes the body.

## IV

### “IF YOU KNEW”

The grand problem of final immobility which Tarragnoz contemplated, breathless from the physical effort, but still more from the other cause, held nothing new for him. It had always been to him a problem of two unknown factors. In which region hovered at this moment (he believed in its existence) the released soul? Still more, what thought that soul of him who had wrought the deliverance? Did it know his mind and reproach him for having obeyed? Was it happy gratitude, or was it an implacable curse, which in the

future would follow the complaisant perpetrator of an act implored in the agony of tortures?

The single fact of the uncertainty caused him poignant surprise. He had felt so sure of the approbation of his conscience. And already the counsellor, which a little earlier had so proudly pretended to be infallible, shuffled and beat about like a witness without conviction implicated in a bad affair. Tarraznoz contemplated his work—for whether lawful or forbidden it was his work. He thought:

“Would you not be able to make a sign?”

Alas! The spectacle before him, if that was the sign requested, was not reassuring. From out of the eyes of the

dead man came a look (if one could call it a look) full of anything save a benediction. Tarragnoz desired to close them, but the task was impossible. One would have said that the eyelids no longer existed. Becoming cowardly, he hastened to cover the face of Walter. Then he called his orderly and sent him to the doctor's house, but the latter at the same moment opened the door.

“His cries stopped,” said the doctor, “and I indeed thought the end had come, but I did not anticipate that it would be so soon. How did he pass away?”

“His complaints diminished, then ceased altogether, and all at once he left his bed to come to me, commencing a

phrase, 'If you knew—' but he was not able to finish it; he fell lifeless and I replaced him upon the bed."

The doctor examined the body while Tarragnoz, covered with a cold perspiration, dreaded the question which would follow; but he was soon reassured.

"I have never seen a stranger case," murmured the doctor, speaking to himself. "Ah, those who do not want to believe in auto-suggestion—in the psychological power!"

At another time Tarragnoz would have made fun of this; one may guess whether he had that desire now.

"Three o'clock in the morning," said the doctor, looking at his watch, "I will write out the facts and notify the cap-

tain. Poor Walter will not be able to remain with us long."

Tuheim bowed his head and said the prayer which he always offered in such cases. Then he quickly disappeared, leaving the lieutenant relieved by this absence of suspicion. From this time forward the terrible secret between himself and the dead was safe. Tarragnoz breathed still more freely when the poor Swiss, long before the sun had reached the meridian, was laid to rest in the sand. When the company had returned to camp after its funeral duty he fell upon his bed overcome with fatigue. He was not, however, able to sleep. Whenever he closed his eyes he immediately saw Walter in front of him, and the bed of torture where Wal-

ter accompanied the going and coming of his leg with the distracting rhythm of his plaints.

At sunset Paul said to himself—and dozens of men around him thought it—“At last we shall be able to sleep.” In fact, a heavy sleep deadened him until three o’clock, when suddenly he imagined that he felt two hands upon his shoulders and heard a hoarse voice which cried:

“If you knew!”

Instantly awake from his nightmare, he endeavored to convince himself that following the emotions of the preceding night the appearance of the phantom was nothing astonishing; but the needed sleep would not return and at three o’clock on the following night, and every

night thereafter, the phantom returned. One would indeed think that, for a man of such a temperament, the impression caused by these regular visits could not be a question of physical terror; but precisely because the imagination of the soldier inured to war was not stirred, his judgment worked all the better. This trouble persisting after the accomplished act made him see and realize its enormity. "If," thought he, "I had in my right mind destroyed the Museum of the Louvre, I should never again know repose. But what are the treasures of all the civilized capitals by the side of this *chef-d'oeuvre* impossible to restore—the human life?"

Some days later, the obsession not having disappeared, he remembered the

words of Tucheim spoken to himself while examining the body. "He was deceived that day. I have good reason to believe that Walter did not die of auto-suggestion, but he doubtless appears to me because I suggest to myself the idea of his appearance at a fixed hour."

Paul soon arrived at the point of asking himself if the doctor, adept in the supernatural, would be able to relieve him of the chronic nightmare; but to gain this help it would be necessary to make a confession which was beyond his power. However, with the regularity of a clock, the apparition showed itself. Each night at three o'clock he started up in an anguished embrace. Then he awakened and was unable to

sleep again. Little by little his health became endangered, his forces were no longer sufficiently repaired by sleep. His judgment lost its sway and, ceasing to find an explanation of the phenomena, he frankly accepted the hypothesis of the classical phantom such as Shakespeare showed haunting the walls of Elsinore. This idea, followed by the conviction that he would be thus haunted all his life, threw him into a gloomy despair, and he naturally arrived at the first degree of folly—the *hatred of the phantom*.

The rôles having changed, it was no longer Walter who could claim that he was the victim. Walter, for whom Tarragnoz had risked his life, was an ingrate, devoid of all sense of justice.

Had he not during the long hours begged his chief to kill him—his chief who had welcomed him to his hut, cared for him and watched over him like a brother? And certainly, if ever a service demanded courage, that was indeed the one. Of what could Walter complain? He declared that he had obtained from many of his comrades their promise to give him the *coup de grâce* upon the battlefield if, fatally wounded, he was in danger of falling into the hands of the Moroccans. With all their savagery, the Moroccans could never invent for him such cruel and long-continued torture. But in this unfortunate disagreement of two old friends one aggravating fact was certain, Tarragnoz had not the advantage of being able

to close his door to Walter. Besides, the phantom added malice and indiscretion to his work; to confuse him, the unhappy Paul fixed his reveille at half past two in order to have his eyes wide open at the fated moment, but it was in vain; the phantom changed its habits and came at two, or waited until Paul was again asleep.

"Lieutenant," said Tucheim to him one day, "you ought to request a sick leave, and pardon me for adding that, if you do not ask for one, I believe my conscience will oblige me to give the order."

"I am not sick," quickly responded the officer.

"You soon will be, I have noticed you; believe me, you should go away

while you are able to travel on horseback. If you are taken down you know we shall not be able to offer you a sleeping car."

"What do you think is the matter with me?"

"*Cerebral hypertension*. Do you sleep well?"

Paul, dreading the outcome of the interrogatory if he answered truthfully, told a lie to the doctor—for the second time.

"I sleep wonderfully well, but I have no appetite."

"Are there any indications of liver trouble? You still have the morphine, have you not?"

"Certainly, certainly," affirmed Paul; he felt himself blushing.

“You must take a furlough. The climate of South-Oranis is against you. You must change places and see the world. The painful end of the poor sergeant has affected your nerves and that is not surprising. You were in the first row at the performance.”

“Has anyone discovered his family?” demanded the officer to change the subject.

“Yes, I have corresponded with her, but without entering into the details of his last moments.”

“I will make my official request for a leave of absence,” declared Paul brusquely.

His superior officer did not show him the medical report joined to his de-

mand, where it mentioned a "fixed idea," which was likely to lead to a grave mental derangement. When the day of his departure arrived the *adieux* of Tucheim to his lieutenant were almost pathetic.

"We may never meet again, but no matter what happens do not forget the hours we have passed together here in this corner of the desert."

"That will not be likely," replied Tarragnoz.

"And if you ever have need of me for any service whatever—you know they call me the 'Parson,' and perhaps you even realize that I somewhat deserve that surname."

Thus, the doctor's speech, begun with serious emotion, ended in pleasantry.

At least no one could doubt his good will, and it was that which grimly decided Tarragnoz never willingly to see again Rudolph Tucheim or Algeria.

## VI

### COUNTESS DE LA GUERNERIE

The spectre forgot to visit Paul during the first night of the journey and during those which followed. The effect of this moral deliverance upon his physical condition did not fail to manifest itself. It was a man almost cheerful and in good condition who set his feet in the capital toward the middle of springtime, when Paris is the most charming place here below.

Tarragnoz believed himself cured of his disgust for civilization after so long a sojourn in a savage country. Not having entered a theatre during all the

preceding season, the representations of domestic infidelity appeared to him nearly new. He had no desire to yawn at the Hippodrome, of which he had formerly said, "It is the promenade of the society women, just as the *Folies-Bergère* is the promenade of the others."

The nymphs of the "*Salon de Peinture*" continued to sponge themselves in the nickeled tubs, instead of hiding their bath, as in the time of his father, in a mysterious corner of the crystal-line lake; but this abuse of the artistic civilization caused him to laugh rather than to become indignant. He resolved to laugh at everything ridiculous, although there was nothing in fact to make one weep.

Unable, as might be expected, to endure life at a hotel, Tarragnoz took an apartment which especially attracted him by the comfortable appearance of the bedroom. He had no intention of giving receptions.

“At last,” said he, in settling himself between the sheets, “I am going to sleep in a real bed—and in *my* bed.”

His sleep was delicious until three o'clock. Then the phantom which he believed he had left at the frontiers of Morocco, appeared, placed its crooked hands upon him, stared at him with its monster-like eyes and barked at him the cabalistic words, “*If you knew!*”

Why, unless by detestable malice, had the phantom chosen this moment for its return? Paul forgot, perhaps, in an-

grily asking himself this question, the flask of morphine which, on finding it the evening before at the bottom of his traveling bag, he had precipitately thrown into the street. One thought and only one came to his mind. The cure which he had believed to be complete was a failure, and after this disappointment he was without hope. The phantom was fastened to him for the rest of his life; his future would be without pleasure and without charm. At times the apparition seemed to experience some lassitude, but that was but little less insupportable. Tarragonoz never went to bed without asking himself, "Will he come?"

Paul was able, however, to adopt certain precautions against the obsession

more conveniently in Paris than in the desert. He arranged to be awakened at the hour when the phantom was expected. Walter in such cases remained invisible, but Paul, in spite of himself, watched for its coming, believing that he would hear its light rap at the door and its discreetly murmured excuse, "Ah, pardon me, you have company, I will return!"

However, all of his comrades envied his good fortune. At the expiration of his furlough and at the moment when he was wondering how to escape returning to Algeria, an old friend of his father, newly promoted to a generalship, selected him for his *aide de camp*. The general in question, detached from the staff, was a member of a com-

mittee of officers acting in Paris, so that Tarragnoz was able not only to enjoy his residence there but to have considerable liberty. Finally, by virtue of his third galloon, he became one of the youngest captains in the army.

All this time when the wind of prosperity filled his sails, his moral cure seemed infallible, at least his sufferings were greatly ameliorated. The phantom, as if occupied elsewhere, rarely visited him. Paul felt a decrease in that which Tucheim called his "cerebral hypertension," but as a natural sequel to the enfeeblement of certain images, the act committed a year previous seemed no longer the deed of a liberator, even in the eyes of the one who had performed it. The excuse itself dim-

inished and Paul simply became in the light of his own reason a man circulating in Paris with a murder upon his conscience.

For a person fleeing from a monotonous existence, such a situation would have the merit of being anything but commonplace, but Paul was not the sort of a man to shut his eyes in the face of trouble, and he was barred by temperament from all confidences. He soon became morose and gloomy to the point of profound melancholy. After a year of this *régime* his affection of the liver reappeared, and the attack this time was severe. The doctor (it was not Tucheim) ordered him to Vichy. Paul begged for mercy.

“Could you not order something else?

Bear in mind that this will be my third cure at Vichy, and I despise the place. I shall find there all the colonial army which I wish to avoid, and still worse, I shall meet the entire civil colony. Finally, dying of *ennui*, I shall gamble, I shall amuse myself, I shall live high and get to bed at two o'clock in the morning. Vichy offers to a sick person, I have never known why, a complete collection of all the pleasures which ruin the health of a vigorous man."

"Then, since you are a model of virtue, I offer you the model of serious waters—Carlsbad. It is a place where the municipal regulations prohibit the visitor from recklessly, or otherwise, amusing himself, eating what is injurious, going to bed later than nine

o'clock, or rising later than six, when the orchestra lets loose with noise sufficient to wake the dead."

"Why have the other doctors never mentioned Carlsbad?"

"Where is your patriotism? Besides, the Parisians would not be able to remain there a week. Think of it! No pretty women, no roulette, no all-night restaurants, no *cafés*! Do you speak German?"

"No, but I shall go there all the same."

Four or five days later Paul arrived at Carlsbad, instead of at Vichy, where everyone went, and the latter fact caused him the first satisfaction; besides, he felt sure of not knowing anyone there and of being able to keep to

himself and live at his ease, not pretending through politeness to be entertained—one of the odious tortures of civilization.

At the Hotel Savoy, which in Carlsbad represents the modern corruption in the midst of the prevailing austerity, they gave him sugary and very good food, and they extinguished but few of the lights before eleven o'clock. Furthermore, contrary to the predictions of his doctor, two Paris ladies, recognized as such at sight, dined at a nearby table. They were elegant, each one according to her age, and their beauty was so similar that the family relation could be easily guessed. Time had spared the face and figure of the mother, limiting itself to covering her

hair with a bed of snow. No one would believe her to be over fifty. By contrast, her daughter, not less beautiful but of a more serious physiognomy, seemed to have reached her thirtieth year. It was she, judging by her *Kurge-maesse* menu, who came to take the Carlsbad cure. Paul Tarragnoz was a fine observer and took all these notes in ten minutes.

With an equally sure glance, he realized that his neighbors were not the sort of persons to whom one could address a word, no matter how respectful, under any pretence whatever. It was apparent that their company was mutually satisfactory, and they intended to keep to themselves. This perfect ignoring of a neighbor would have decided any-

one but Tarragnoz against trying to follow the matter further, but we already know his horror of the commonplace, that is to say, of doing the conventional thing.

“Yes, ladies,” said he to himself, “I know very well what you are thinking at this moment. Without once turning your eyes in my direction, you are aware that I have looked at you and that I find you beautiful. ‘A man from Paris thrown upon a deserted island with two *Parisiennes* of the first quality! Of course, he is racking his brains to find a way to meet us and of course we shall have to give him a little dash of cold water.’ Well, ladies, that is where you deceive yourselves, you have no need of a hydropathic apparatus. I

shall salute you very politely on the stairway and in the vestibule, because you are my compatriots, and that is all!"

This severe *modus vivendi* did not prevent Paul from inquiring the names of the two handsome ladies. They were, as he had foreseen, mother and daughter, the latter the Countess de la Guernerie, the other simply Madame Villedieu. Halim, the superb Egyptian with the ebony face, who watched at the portals of this "Louvre," completed this information with some details of small interest: "They had arrived from Paris the preceding week with but little baggage; their apartment was secured in advance at the Villa Cleopatra, a dependency of the hotel where the

price is higher; their *femme de chambre* (you should have seen the grimace of Halim) was at least fifty and not at all agreeable." Halim believed they were both widows; they saw no one; they arose early to drink the waters, and drove out in a carriage each afternoon; returning to their rooms after dinner, they did not again leave.

This was the same sort of life that Paul led, except that he had no *femme de chambre* and went out regularly afoot. He walked for hours through the pine forests, whose paths with seats, with cafés, indeed even with chapels, mounted toward the summit, descended to the river, winding round hills, without ever bringing the promenader back

to the same point. End to end they would have extended many miles.

The first time that he bowed to the two ladies in the garden which separated the Villa from the larger establishment, they responded with a marked difference in their movements. The younger appeared as if acknowledging the receipt of a printed invitation, such as one sends to everybody; the other added a look of rapid and satisfied intelligence which simply meant, "Certainly we are from the same country and I see that you have good manners. Please continue."

For some days matters ran thus. Madame Villedieu sometimes bowed first in the English fashion, but as to the

countess, it was clear that she could not tell if the young man who had removed his hat when meeting her had a blond moustache or black whiskers.

“Is this affectation or prudery?” asked Tarragnoz to himself. Upon considering it thoroughly, he was forced to admit that it was simply indifference. The countess seemed to be deprived of the faculty of interesting herself in any subject whatever, animate or inanimate. When about to dine, to the question of her mother who studied the menu, the observer could divine from a distance that her reply was always the same: “It is immaterial to me.” And when installed in the landau by the side of her mother, to the question, “Where shall we go to-day?” Tarragnoz heard her

respond, "Wherever you like, mamma."

The full sonorous voice, pitched rather low, did not seem to be that of a complaining person, suffering in body and lamenting someone deceased. Halim must be deceived in believing her to be a widow. Monsieur de la Guernerie was doubtless a husband neither good nor bad, and she, like so many others, was neither adored nor detested; probably his wife used to reply to him, "It is immaterial to me"—at the table, in the carriage, or anywhere. Tarragnoz fancied he could hear him say, "My dear, shall I accompany you to Bohemia or remain here to open the hunting season?" and her reply, "It is immaterial to me, my friend." It was

more than probable that this proud beauty was neither broken-hearted nor a victim of delusion; she was simply a young woman bored with herself.

Putting himself in the count's place, he found her exasperating; upon his own account it was of course no consequence whether she was cold or loving. But how could the husband prefer the company of young partridges to the company of such an attractive young woman? In all justice she was worthy of a husband who would take some pains to draw her out of her torpor.

This question formed itself in the mind of Tarragnoz one day, when he saw Madame de la Guernerie leave her carriage to drink some milk at a rustic *café* where he himself was seated at one

of the tables. The extraordinary splendor of the mountain sun gave to the mass of her golden brown hair an unreal character, like the halo of a saint. But the dark brown eyes, sometimes feasting upon the surrounding verdure, sometimes following with greediness the velvety cascade of milk as it was poured into the glass, the nostrils opened to pine breezes, the red lips, such as painters never give to mouths created specially for celestial joys—all of these indicated anything but a saint; yet the noble elevation of her thoughts and habits showed in all her person.

Madame de la Guernerie and her mother evidently believed themselves alone in the little restaurant to which few persons came as the season was

nearly ended. Tarragnoz, hidden by the ivy curtain which separated their arbors, observed all the motions of the young woman. In order to crumble a little black bread into her cream she slowly removed her gloves and, like beautiful birds given their liberty, her rosy fingers stretched themselves, sparkling like mother of pearl. She wore no jewels. A little apple-cheeked girl of ten years came up to her offering some wild flowers. For the first time Paul saw her smile. He smiled himself at the hackneyed comparison that came to his mind. It was like the sparkle of snow in the bosom of a purple cloud; but later, on descending the slopes already in the shadow, he asked himself, "Does she never smile except in the

woods?" In fact, when he saw her two hours later under the lights of the Savoy, she was more exasperating than ever with her appearance of universal indifference.

The next day while Tarragnoz was smoking in the vestibule, he saw the two ladies cross to their carriage, where the Egyptian negro helped them to their seats. At the old Versailles form of salute which Tarragnoz gave them, they responded each according to her habit. The carriage departed and Halim returned.

"Fine day to drive up to *Stephanie Warte!*"

Halim had thrown this remark at the captain as he passed him, with no other motive than an inborn need of saying

something, no matter what, to someone, no matter who. The captain struggled for five minutes against the desire to do the most commonplace act in the world. Finally he took his hat and left the hotel, and when he was certain that Halim could no longer see him, he hailed an *Einspaenner*, figuring that, notwithstanding the short cut open to pedestrians, the landau of the ladies would reach its destination ahead of him.

“*Stephanie Warte, Kutscher; geschwind.*”

These were all the German words he knew.

*Stephanie Warte* is a semi-feudal tower, surmounting a *café*, and overlooking all the valley at Tepl and its mantle of forests. The ascension of two

thousand feet is sufficiently long even in a carriage. It was intensely hot, and Paul seeing the horse white with foam congratulated himself on not being obliged to walk, at the same time compassionately regretting that he had not taken a double team. When he arrived at the *café* it was the hour for serving coffee and fifty or more promenaders were upon the esplanade; but among those at the tables he perceived neither the countess nor her mother. He had, however, recognized the coachman smoking his porcelain pipe in the stables. In looking more carefully he discovered the two ladies some distance away in the crowd, leaning upon the parapet of a little terrace from which a grand view spread out before them.

This time Madame de la Guernerie did not smile.

Tarragnoz, hidden behind the trees, saw her clasp her hands with a passionate gesture of admiration, while her mother's face brightened up.

"Decidedly, her preferences are for nature," thought the young man.

How long they would have remained, one contemplating nature, the other contemplating the young lady herself, may be imagined. A clap of thunder echoed many times in the neighboring gorges put an end to their contemplations. The countess, not in the least afraid, seemed delighted to have this picturesque element added to the tableau. Her mother, more prudent, led her away from the esplanade, which

was already vacated by the more cautious ones. At the stables the captain again met his two compatriots. The horses had just been harnessed to their landau, but the shafts of Paul's *Einspaenner* remained empty. A groom approached Tarragnoz and, with the gesture of a tragedian, spoke to him in German.

“Do you think that I can understand that?” said the captain, considerably disturbed as he saw the first drops of a heavy shower falling.

Madame Villedieu, already installed with her daughter under the bonnet of the carriage, beckoned to him to come nearer.

“Monsieur,” translated she, “your horse is rolling upon the straw with an

attack of colic. Probably they gave him water too cold."

Tarragnoz made a low bow.

"Thanks, Madame. When my horse is well, if he gets well, I will inform him of your gracious interest."

The speech of the young humorist was ludicrous under the circumstances. Madame de la Guernerie almost smiled. As for her mother, she understood that Tarragnoz found her more sympathetic to beasts than to men. To read between the lines is one of the admirable gifts of the French language, especially when it is a French woman who reads.

"Monsieur," said she, "my daughter and I do not intend to allow a compatriot to descend the mountain on foot in such a shower; do we, Valentine?"

“As you like, mamma.”

“The invitation is not pressing,” thought Tarragnoz, “but, anyway, her ‘It is immaterial to me,’ would have been worse.” It rained in torrents. He took his place in the landau, making the usual excuses for the inconvenience that he caused, although he caused none whatever.

His good humor disappeared as he felt himself ridiculous in the eyes of the two women in this rôle of a small, delicate young man, picked up along the road to prevent his taking cold; but it was to himself that Tarragnoz felt most ashamed. He possessed precisely that kind of refined self-respect to which an inward derision is the least supportable of all. He had intended

to astonish, and perhaps spite these two women by his cold reserve, and now he had been obliged to accept their service as interpreters, thankfully to make use of their carriage; in fact, to place himself under obligation to them when he really wished to give them a lesson.

Thus placed, their companion of the route could hardly be expected to shine as a conversationalist, although under the circumstances the least he could do was to amuse them for an hour. While he sought for a subject other than the rain, the mud, or the surprising changes of weather in the Valley of Tepl, it was Madame Villedieu again who relieved him from his embarrassment.

“Monsieur,” said she, “Carlsbad seems to bore you considerably.”

“No more than I anticipated, Madame. I was warned by my doctor, who gave me the choice between Vichy and the waters of Bohemia.”

“Just the same with us, but if I had been a man I would have preferred Vichy, where the pill of treatment is disguised in the preserves of the Casino.”

“Horrible mixture! When I was a child, after my cod liver oil they gave me a mint lozenge, and the result was that without converting me to the remedy I had a horror of the bonbon. I ought also to say that Carlsbad has given me a delightful surprise. The surroundings of the place, beautiful beyond comparison, possess an inexplicable charm, restful and purifying,

which even the same scenery in our country would not have."

Madame de la Guernerie, who had not yet spoken, said with a tranquil and deep voice, "It is true, and I have often asked myself why it is so."

"Because the human element plays a great rôle in nature. These Bohemians are an honest and conscientious race. The roadmen who keep the pretty roads in such good order work faithfully during their short day. Have you ever seen our equipages of the Bois de Boulogne give way to any work whatever? My doctor here remained with me for half an hour in order to decide if I ought to take a glass of water more or a glass the less. The street sweepers take a thousand cares not to allow a

single microbe to escape. I love the Austrians because for them conscience still exists."

"You believe in it, then, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Madame, for the same painful reason that sometimes makes me believe in too narrow shoes. Willing or unwilling, they make themselves felt."

"I have met men who have seemed to know where they could be procured sufficiently large," said Madame de la Guernerie.

She relapsed into silence, and Madame Villedieu changed the subject by asking the young man, "Are you the son or the nephew of the celebrated painter?"

"I am his son, but not his successor. I belong to the army."

“Where is your garrison?”

“In Paris, Madame, if one might call the ante-chamber of a general, whose *aide de camp* I am, a garrison. He is detached from the staff and is somewhat out of health, and that gives me the time to be ill myself, as you observe.”

Thereupon they talked of Paris, where these ladies spent only three months in the winter, and Madame Villedieu remarked, “At the first signs of spring my daughter drags me to the country.”

In listening to this badly disguised complaint, Paul understood that the mother and daughter were not always in accord.

“As for me, I adore Paris—for a

couple of weeks—since I have passed two years away from it.”

“That would be a history of many infatuations, if frankness were less known in the world,” remarked the countess.

“Good!” thought the captain, “that was addressed to our rascal of a husband. Is it necessary, then, to believe that in the eyes of her lawful owner a woman ceases to be beautiful so quickly?”

Placed opposite to Madame de la Guernerie for an hour, Paul learned to appreciate her beauty as a lesson which one never forgets.

## VII

### THE MEERSCHAUM PIPE

The next day, having turned down the corner of one of his cards, he crossed the garden and rang the bell of the Villa Cleopatra when he knew the ladies were not at home. He thus very correctly thanked them for the kindness shown him, leaving them to make the advance if they desired to continue the acquaintance. The same evening, as he was finishing his dinner, Madame Villedieu motioned to him to come to her table.

“I regret,” said she, “that I missed your call. As we leave Carlsbad so

soon, I propose making amends at once if you have no more amusing project for this evening.”

Shortly afterward he entered the elegant, flowery, well-lighted drawing-room where Madame Villedieu alone awaited him—a fact which changed his good humor into sulkiness. Madame de la Guernerie on account of fatigue had retired to her room.

“As for me,” confessed the mother, “I love to sit up late. I read, I embroider, or I have a game of solitaire when my daughter is not here, for she cannot endure the sight of cards.”

“I have already noticed,” said Tarragnoz, smiling, “that your tastes and those of your daughter are not always the same.”

“Since the death of her husband she has carried her retirement from the world to an exaggerated length; I deplore it, if only for the sake of her health. But you, Monsieur, are you not something of a misanthrope?”

“Oh, Madame! that is a big word. I believe that my character is simply badly formed. I always see the bad side of things, and that defect makes a human being detestable. I have even the great misfortune of seeing my own faults and of knowing that my neighbors also discover them. To imagine that one is perfect and admired by everyone is the secret of absolute felicity.”

“And of absolute egotism.”

“Goodness, Madame, they are all one.”

“Have you no friends of your own age to draw you into their pleasures?”

“My generation is not a gay one, Madame. You are too near to it not to understand. As to friendship—I know of nothing in the world more beautiful or more useless. You have doubtless many friends ready to give up their life for you, have they ever been able to relieve you of a headache? Have you ever been able to prevent them from catching cold?”

“Yes,” replied the charming woman, with a malicious light in her eyes, “I have been able to offer them a place in my carriage at the moment of a sudden shower.”

“But please remember that the unfortunate man welcomed by you had not the honor of being your friend, and that gives me the right to repeat the question—‘What is the use of friendship?’ ”

“Sometimes by bad advice to cause ruin, sorrow and death!” responded a voice vibrating and deep, behind him.

The young man turned. From a portière, pushed aside by her beautiful bare arm, Madame de la Guernerie swayed like an apparition which might be called tragic, if the light mauve satin of a *peignoir* with large sleeves, the golden brown of the hair and the wonderful complexion with matchless brown eyes, were the ordinary attributes of the heroine of a tragedy. The visitor un-

derstood that from her boudoir adjoining the drawing-room she had followed the conversation. He might have felt flattered that she desired to join them, but the words which had just fallen from that beautiful mouth caused him a painful emotion, the more so as they were unexpected. Had she also upon her conscience the death of a friend?

He arose, stammering some polite phrase, to which Madame de la Guernerie responded only by extending her hand. She was already seated.

“Monsieur,” said she, becoming suddenly calm, “in talking philosophy with my mother you deceive yourself from the beginning. She is the young and charming one; I am serious, which is

doubtless a hateful defect in your eyes, but I no longer pretend to be perfect."

The young man understood that none of his remarks had been lost. "I believe that were women perfect they would perhaps become detestable," affirmed he, a little vexed. "Thank goodness, I have never known that distressing situation."

Soon the young woman appeared to be tired and said good-night to her mother. "Do you play *piquet*?" she asked Tarragnoz. "Yes? Very well, come to-morrow and have a game with mamma. She is here on my account, and the least I can do is to arrange some pleasure for her."

The captain's night was greatly disturbed. The phantom, whose appear-

ance had been less regular of late, mixed itself up in a horribly displeasing manner with the mauve satin and glorious hair of a living and charming young woman. The day following seemed long to him. Already upon all the sodded slopes which surround Carlsbad one could hear the noise of carpets beaten, like the rolling of a drum. This announced the early closing of the *pensions* and hotels.

After dinner Paul went to the Villa Cleopatra.

“Come,” said the countess pleasantly; “commence your game. As I am a serious person I will keep to my thoughts.”

“The moment has arrived when I must admit to you a deception,” said

the captain. "I have never touched a card in my life."

"It is a good point," declared the countess. "Then you can falsify at times?"

"I would like to see the hero capable of admitting that he does not play *piquet*, knowing that two amiable women would at once respond, 'In that case, dear sir, you are good for nothing; remain at home'."

"There is yet time to give you that advice."

"But I am good for something. You have said so yourself. I can talk philosophy."

"Eh! Let us have a lecture. That is the proper thing just now."

"Give me a subject."

"The art of being happy," suggested Valentine de la Guernerie, raising her beautiful eyebrows.

"Alas! I am badly equipped for that. It would be as reasonable to ask you to give us a talk on *the art of being plain*."

"Mamma," bewailed the countess, "what a pity it is that you left your album at home!"

Her words did not exceed in irony the limit for a woman properly brought up, but Paul understood that they made fun of the madrigal of which he was proud.

"Pardon me," said he, trying not to show himself piqued, "I forgot that we are no longer in France."

"It has occurred to me," observed the countess, "that you prefer conscientious Bohemia to clever France."

“At this moment,” responded he, “I think only of the country which has been good for me.”

Saying these words he kissed the hand of Madame Villedieu and made a low bow to her daughter. He reached the hotel a little earlier than he expected.

His sleep was a long time coming, but the time passed very quickly in bringing an action against the countess. To resume, in a word, the long speech of the prosecutor, that young woman was unbearable. Even her beauty counted in the eyes of Paul as a grievance, or rather as a disagreeable intrusion, obstructing the circulation. Since seeing her he had not been able to move with the same freedom of ac-

tion. He was reminded of the complaints often expressed by one of his friends who had passed a season near Avranches. The friend was struck with the grandeur of Mount Saint Michael and was unable to ride in a carriage, go out on foot, sail in a boat, or even to remain at his window, without perceiving the "wonder."

Paul, in reality, saw this other wonder but twice a day, yet when she was not in sight he asked himself, in spite of his efforts to think of something else, if this other phantom would not appear under the colonnades of the Kursaal, along the row of shops of the Alte-Wiese, or—where she might especially be expected—at the turning of some wild lane of the pine forest,

a proper frame for her fairy-like beauty.

Yet, however, he realized that the obsession of which he seemed to complain left in him a disagreeable void. This woman who embarrassed him and made fun of him when she was present would be missed when she left, just as Mount Saint Michael, removed from view on some fine morning, would have been missed by his friend.

"All this," said he to himself, "is pure imagination. I am like a man who has upon his tongue a pimple no larger than the head of a pin and imagines he has a mountain in his mouth. Whatever happens, the countess will not have the occasion to regret her album. To-morrow our acquaintance will re-

turn to merely a bow. My *reason* orders it."

Unfortunately it was not wholly in others that Valentine de la Guernerie admired a conscience. She had examined her own and it had blamed her for having been malicious. The result was that the next day Tarragnoz saw her coming toward the armchair in which he was seated with his newspaper in hand and a cigarette in his lips.

"Captain," said she, "I see that you are a smoker and I venture to ask your assistance. I would like to have your help in choosing a meerschaum pipe, as I fear the dealer will take advantage of my ignorance. Will you perform this fatigue-duty forthwith? Mamma, I will return in half an hour."

Five minutes later the countess and her companion were descending the pathway broken with steps and shaded with dwarf linden trees which runs from Schlossberg to the single street of the lower town. With the facility of a real society woman, she began immediately one of those agreeable conversations which naturally follow the meeting of two friends. Although she avoided the slightest allusion, Paul understood perfectly that she was indemnifying him for the wrong of the evening before. To say that he lowered his arms from the first moment would hardly be true.

However, the peace had been signed, without the slightest direct mention, when the two enemies of the previous

evening arrived at the pipe-maker's. There Madame de la Guernerie gave her orders, to tell the truth without much consultation with Tarragnoz. She ordered a monogram to be made in relief. She even indicated the design with a firm stroke of her pencil—a design so original that it struck her companion. The letters R. T. remained in his eyes.

“Your friend will certainly be pleased,” said he; “for I think this present is not intended for a cousin.”

“No, it is indeed for a friend, and for one of the most devoted friends that I have.”

Without further explanation, Madame de la Guernerie, having given her address, left the shop and went slowly

back toward the Savoy. As might be expected, in view of the motive which brought about their reunion at this time, they spoke of friendship. Tarragonoz, exclusively imbued with French ideas (without approving of them), maintained that friendship of one sex for another was impossible, unless the combined ages of the two parties equalled a century.

“How very tiresome!” said the countess. “Then I must wait some forty years before giving you a meerschäum pipe?”

“Oh! by that time I shall have long ceased to be for you an acquaintance of the city of waters. How hatefully commonplace it is for people to cling to you simply because they have waited

their turn at the same spring for two or three weeks!"

"Quite commonplace, yet one cannot always wait for a strong friendship to begin in the lifeboat of a sinking vessel."

"That would be hardly correct. The shipwreck is one of our conventional ideas from which one must never depart. Existence in what you call society is based upon a system that has for its object the suppression of everything unexpected; in other words, every impulse. If you owe your fortune to your inveigling for a legacy, and if in three or four different ground-floor apartments I receive the wives of three or four particularly dear friends, we could tranquilly go our way, because such

things are not contrary to the system. But if, in obedience to an impulse which I assume might be reciprocal, we were to establish a serious friendship, open and innocent, then you would be a rebel without principles, and I a sad individual, compromising women."

"Good Lord!" said she, laughing, "I hope the world will never know that I took you to help me choose a pipe. Anyway, I have never seen a man maintain discouraging theories in such a cheerful manner."

"You know the proverbial gaiety of undertakers' assistants. Then I shall say to you *au revoir*—for forty years. The misfortune is that in forty days you will have forgotten that I exist."

"Will you wager that I forget you?"

"Ten to one," responded Paul, kissing her extended hand.

Two days later he accompanied the two ladies to the last Carlsbad Express, for the season was at an end. He had pardoned Madame de la Guernerie for having trampled upon his madrigals.

"I will make you a sign when we again become Parisiennes," she had promised.

As for himself, his treatment finished, he regained France by way of Munich and the Italian lakes. He again took up his duties near his General. His physical and, above all, his moral condition was better. The morning often came to him without his having been awakened by the apparition of Walter, but outwardly there was no change in

his misanthropy. In the eyes of the world, and of his comrades, he appeared either "cracked" or a snob, according to tastes.

## VIII

### RUE DE L'YVETTE

Toward the latter part of November he received this note:

"Monsieur, I have won my wager. Some evening when you have neither a worldly obligation nor an 'impulse' permitted or forbidden by the 'system' you will find us, my mother and me, in our chimney-corner at half-past nine. If you have forgotten our names, it will be sufficient for me to say that we are *the ladies of the Villa Cleopatra*. That is enough to call you back again to the scent. Kind regards from your acquaintances of the City of Waters."

"Villedieu La Guernerie,  
"14, rue de l'Yvette (it's fright-  
fully far), at the end of the court."

She who had scribbled this card perhaps knew the mind of the person to

whom it was addressed, as its receipt caused no surprise. One should understand by that that ever since the lighting up of heating apparatus and the appearance of muffs, he had asked himself, "Will the sign which she promised come to-day?"

This was not, as one might wrongly suppose, the confidence of a coxcomb certain of having produced an indelible impression; but he had read in the eyes of the countess—and others before him had read the same thing—that a promise coming from her was equivalent to an accomplished fact. Although he prided himself upon his scrupulous faithfulness in all social engagements, this did not prevent his sending his orderly ten minutes later to the telegraph

office with a despatch for the mistress of a house where he was expected to dinner. "Unexpected work," "affairs of service," "regrets," "sorrow"—nothing was lacking in the imposture of his excuse. Which one of us is without sin? In these days, they no longer, thank goodness, pelt a man with stones even for such impoliteness as this.

To say that the rue de l'Yvette is situated in Auteuil gives but a faint idea of the distance. The inhabitants of Auteuil, themselves ignorant of the name, declare with emphasis that "it is a lost quarter," thus giving one the impression of being near the Stock Exchange. Accustomed to the study of maps, the captain arrived at the indicated address without mistaking the

way and without being late. Madame Villedieu and her daughter certainly resided at the end of a court, but it was *their* court; and the little hotel—a jewel—was *their* hotel.

In a drawing-room, surprisingly large, some shaded electric lamps lighted the room without dazzling the eyes. In a vase placed upon the table were a dozen superb roses; remarkable simplicity in these times of universal wealth, when the least *bourgeoise* in her floral decorations considers quantity before everything else. Besides there was no apparent desire to “strike with surprise” or even to instruct the public. Nothing to reveal whether one was in the house of a great pianist, a celebrated sculptor, a collector of specimens, or in

the house of a subscriber to *Revue*s, endowed with a ferocious appetite, or even in the house of a simple bridge player. But we already know that Madame de la Guernerie did not like cards. Manifestly she loved all of the comforts of life, moral and physical. Paul Tarragnoz employed precisely those terms in responding to the question of Madame de la Guernerie, who wished to know, "How he was impressed with the place?" She raised her shoulders slightly on seeing his look of surprise at her question.

"Let us see," said she, "do you think we are vain—or modest—to the point of soliciting admiration for ourselves? I ask you what you think of this setting? Suppose you were an author, furbish-

ing the first twenty pages, describing this drawing-room and revealing to the reader the good qualities or the faults of those who live here?"

Paul, improvising upon the suggested theme, recited in the tone of a man reading in a loud voice:

"At the first view one concludes that the countess and her mother are preoccupied above everything else with the moral and physical comforts of life; or, if you prefer, the ideal of their life is simplicity, regularity and comfort. They are friends, not the slaves of order, as shown by the arrangement of things, nearly all of which are useful and not more numerous than they should be without becoming a burden. The furniture, whose convenience is

not less reproachable than its taste, is not obliged to offer proofs of nobility; one sees that it is never asked, 'Where did you come from?' but 'What are you good for?' "

"Bravo!" interrupted Madame de la Guernerie. "You may add, that we put that question not only to furniture but to persons."

"All that," said Madame Villedieu, without bitterness, "amounts to this—that we appear like two good *bourgeoises*."

"No, you have the appearance of persons who, having travelled and suffered in their peregrinations—I speak from experience—know the price of happiness and repose."

"It is true," admitted the countess,

becoming a little sad, "we have travelled much in the country of affliction. I have an uncle, an old sea captain, who is gently growing old in his retirement. 'Although he was well situated in Brittany, he established himself in Touraine, because the sight of the sea recalled to him 'too small allowances of tobacco,' to use his own words. You know now why we inhabit this family *pension* by ourselves, where only heroism and friendship could bring a human being. The sight of the world would recall to us 'too small allowances of tobacco,' as my uncle would say. Let it be said in passing that the aversion of the old sailor for the empire of Neptune works to our profit, for he lends us his castle in Morbihan."

Madame Villedieu breathed a sigh, "It is nearly as far from Paris as the rue de l'Yvette!"

"Patience!" said Madame de la Guernerie, "you know very well, mamma, it is understood that when we are old we shall live in the *place Vendôme*, and the society columns of the *Gaulois* will resound with your name, for we shall have had time to forget the pitching and the nausea." From the moment he entered the house of these ladies, Paul was astonished that he should feel so little like a stranger. Before leaving he mentioned this surprise.

"From the time of your leaving Carlsbad until I rang your door-bell this evening, we had completely lost sight of each other. I was ignorant of

your address and did not consider it proper to ask you for it, yet this evening I discovered that our friendship has increased in the interval, just as children placed with a village nurse continue to grow as fast as before."

"They often grow faster than other children," said Madame de la Guernerie with her "dangerous" smile.

Tarragnoz qualified the smile in his thoughts, because it resembled the sudden and charming scratching of a young cat which playfully pretends to be asleep.

All the time, reflecting upon this friendship,—he had plenty of time during his long journey home—Paul realized that in the wall of the past no door of communication between them gave

any appearance of opening itself. With Madame Villedieu and her daughter he had never been surprised by the least sign of curiosity concerning his previous existence. Bearing in mind his desire to forget a certain drama in his life, one may judge if this lack of interest was not agreeable. The result was, however, that it deprived him of the right to be curious himself. Questioning, he risked being interrogated in his turn, and his comrades had already discovered that the entire period of his career in Africa was in their conversations a forbidden subject.

Be that as it may, anyone understanding his nature would be able to divine that these two women, unusual in their retirement, each one attractive accord-

ing to her fashion, were for him ideal friends. His visits to the rue de l'Yvette, after the dinner hour, soon became a habit. He was very quickly enlightened upon the intimate character of the relations between the countess and her mother. The latter manifestly sacrificed her own tastes, first through fondness for her daughter (that goes without saying) but also through a desire to make reparation for an injustice. What had been the maternal wrong Paul had no means of knowing. The question put with an indifferent air to some of his acquaintances had enlightened him but little. No one seemed to have known the Count de la Guernerie. However, one friend, thus interrogated, believed that "the poor Valentine,"

very unhappy in her domestic affairs, was finally abandoned by her husband who, as was highly proper, went off to die in America.

It should be noted that Tarragnoz carefully avoided even mentioning the name of the street where these ladies lived. Having discovered that charming isle, he had the caution not to introduce there anyone else who might prove to be an annoyance, possibly a rival. One should not conclude, however, from this that he admitted to himself having a lover's jealousy upon the subject of Madame de la Guernerie, but we have already foreseen a motion in that direction. This was the beginning of a sliding scarcely discernible. Thus, according to the laws of gravity, an object

starts with a sluggishness which scarcely permits one to see that it has changed its position. Then the fall becomes more rapid, and mathematicians will tell you that the velocity increases in a geometrical proportion to the duration of its flight. Alone, in the last tramway from Auteuil, where he was able to meditate, Paul Tarragnoz discovered one evening that he was sliding with full force.

That is what he risked in frequently meeting a young lady delightfully different from others, under the grateful eye of a mother who, after so many years, sees the smile hover anew upon the lips of her daughter.

To know this joy Madame Villedieu had tried everything within her power,

and fortune had sent to her in the person of Tarragnoz, if not the remedy sought for, at least a salutary diversion of the young widow's sadness. She welcomed him with open arms, without concealing it from anyone, not even her brother, the captain of the steamship Couaridouc, who had come from Touraine to pass the greater part of the winter in Paris. The latter, an old bachelor, still robust, passed his evenings in places more congenial to him than the rue de l'Yvette, consequently he had never met Tarragnoz, although he had often heard the name of the young man. One evening, in the absence of his niece, he lectured Madame Villedieu with the frankness of a sailor.

“You are a great one! To amuse

Valentine you have given her this plaything, without asking if he has anything but a stomach in his anatomy. What assurance have you that this young fellow hasn't a heart under his belt?"

"It is good for a man to be a little in love."

"And if he is much in love?"

"You don't know him. Your engineers have never turned your propeller with so much regularity as this philosopher has shown in ordering his inward ticking."

"And if it is Valentine who is smitten?"

"Poor little one! Her horror of men has killed in her all ability to love."

"However, from what you say, this

young man does not seem to be such a horror to her."

"Precisely, because he permits her to forget that he is a young man. I believe that he, too, is limping from some great battlefield, but he does not take advantage of it to make himself tiresome."

"Say the word, then, he amuses you!"

"Do you see much harm in that? If you menace the life which I lead!——"

"The devil take me if I would accept it! Valentine takes the advantage of her limping, as you say, to require that you go lame, too. Well, I am going to escape. They are waiting for me at the Ministry of Marine."

"Bad subject!"

## IX

### THE MEETING WITH DOCTOR TUCHEIM

Madame Villedieu was not so deprived of the pleasures of the world that she wished to complain of it. She received each Tuesday. On that day, during the whole afternoon, the drawing room of the little hotel became her private domain where, when the communications were not cut off by bad weather, a dozen or more friends of both sexes, faithful to old recollections, came to give the place a little of the atmosphere of the world. While they chatted in the lower part of the house, Madame de la

Guernerie fortified herself in her boudoir on the floor above. Her mother's visitors, all born under the gay period of the second Empire, finding this young woman but little amusing, did not disturb her.

Paul, always the first one to arrive on the reception days of Madame Villedieu, made a pretence of leaving when anyone else arrived. Then, after climbing twenty stairs, he received the thanks of the countess for coming to bore himself with her. At five o'clock their tea was sent up, as to children in the school-room. Tarragnoz silently watched the young woman carry the cup of tea to her lips, unfolding an exquisite line from the laces of her short sleeve to the rosy nail of her delicately carved finger.

At such times he no longer saw the phantom of Walter.

Sometimes, even, he had the pleasure of passing an entire night without any apparition. On the other hand, he was often tormented by insomnia, but it was better to be haunted by a living beauty than by a dead man with a frightful visage. At the same time, thanks to the meeting of a comrade better informed than himself upon society chronicles, Paul made considerable progress in the study of history, that is to say, the history of Valentine.

According to this friend, the sorrow of the young widow (and this was consoling to the lover), consisted less in the loss of her husband than in the regret of having married some six years too

soon. Guernerie had quickly shown himself to be a bad man, but very quickly also, and very discreetly, he had taken himself off, delivering of his presence a wife too prompt in accepting him and a mother-in-law with too little discernment. He had been killed in a railroad accident in America. As to the young widow, the comrade of Tarragnoz was unable to say anything.

She was never seen with him in society, because her dowry had disappeared at the same time with her illusions, or, perhaps there was a "mysterious comforter." At these words Paul showed his indignation in a manner that his comrade could not ignore.

"Pardon! If you are one of her friends——"

“I have not the honor, but I have seen her and her mother at Carlsbad. They lived like recluses, speaking to no one, and the young woman seemed still more unsociable than the other.”

“Is she still handsome?”

“Yes, rather,” and the conversation changed its course.

It is much to know that Valentine had not loved her husband, and still more to know that there was no comforter, acknowledged or mysterious. But Paul was disturbed in never hearing the victim speak of her griefs, thus showing that her soul was closed to all consolations. Usually, those who have endured shipwreck, willingly recount their adventures. Madame de la Guernerie, by her silence, let it be seen that

even after returning to the shore she retained in her mouth too much of the bitter taste of salt water to embark again.

This discouraging impression, which Paul more and more experienced, was not the result of an affirmative protestation but he *felt* that she was as much closed to his love as a rose of last spring dried in a drawer is closed to the sap. When she perceived that this young man, duly warned, nevertheless ventured to love her, she was no more frightened than a battleship would be of a rowboat, and furthermore, she did not train her weapons upon him.

Perhaps she has been told that a woman does not know what it is to be loved until she is loved "without hope."

She soon learned this from Paul's sad avowal. She listened in silence, without being able to do or say anything to dispel the clouds which enveloped his heart. This was shortly before her departure for Brittany, which would naturally have occurred "at the first signs of spring," as Madame Villedieu had remarked; but the latter, for once, had gained three weeks, which showed that her daughter was not entirely without pity for those who suffer. In the numerous gardens upon the rue de l'Yvette the lilac bushes were almost in bloom when they commenced to pack their trunks. A radiant sun burst out upon "their last Tuesday."

"You must forget me," urged the beautiful countess, somewhat late, while

the mother served the tea in the drawing-room below.

“I must find a way to keep from dying, bewailed the deserted man, covering with kisses the softest hand in the world.

As this familiarity constituted “his maximum” he, without rebelling, resigned himself to the situation. It may well be imagined that he so “resigned himself” on frequent occasions.

The railway station of the quay d’Orsay resembled more than ever a funeral vault on a certain evening when he assisted Madame Villedieu and her daughter aboard the train for Auray.

He said to the countess, as they walked up and down the platform, “You are naturally delighted to leave.”

“Delighted! were it not for my mother I would have been watching the furze bloom a long time ago.”

The cruelty of this reply was slightly contradicted by the look that accompanied it.

“Will you permit me to come and see *you* in bloom during my autumn furlough?”

“Brittany is free to everybody, my friend.”

“Will you allow me to write to you sometimes?”

“That greatly depends upon what you write. Besides, my mother reads all my letters.”

Paul exhibited such a profound despondency that she gave him her

"dangerous smile." "All, or nearly all," corrected she with compassion.

"What shall I do with myself when I am not writing to you?"

"You may be hoping for a reply to your letters."

Suddenly Valentine, in her turn, appeared discouraged. "If only I could change places with you!" she sighed almost in a whisper.

They closed the portières. That was her last word of adieu. Standing upon the running-board of the car which had already started, Paul had once more "his maximum."

He walked home. As he somewhat hurriedly passed the omnibus station of the bridge of the Concorde, a man mod-

estly dressed, after carefully studying his face, extended his hand.

“Pardon me,” said Tarragnoz, “but——”

“I pardon you,” said a voice with a strong accent of the Rhine. “You have never seen me in civilian clothes, and it is not surprising that you do not recognize me.”

“Doctor Tucheim! Is it possible? You have left the Legion?”

“A year ago; I am attached to Val de Grâce. You, captain, if I am not mistaken, are an aide de camp?”

“Yes, a service of idleness. Is it not strange that we should meet here by chance, in a place so much unlike——?”

At this point of the conversa-

tion Paul interrupted himself, absorbed by the question which came to his mind: "Is this meeting fortunate?"

"I accompanied some friends here," said he for the sake of saying something.

"I am waiting for the autobus from Montparnasse," explained the doctor. "I recognized you, although you have changed, but the change is for the better, and you appear younger. We shall soon meet again, I hope."

Tarragnoz felt a sort of fear in again seeing this man who was connected with the terrible events of his life, but faithful to his system of keeping a firm control over that which Madame Villedieu called his "inward ticking," he asked

the address of Tucheim and promised to call soon. The noisy arrival of the heavy vehicle separated them. Less than a week later he rapped at the door of his comrade.

At the moment he was no longer the lover pursued by his dream, but in spite of everything the "innocent assassin" tortured by remorse. The astonishing thing was that he experienced a strong desire to open his soul to the "good parson," the guardian of so many secrets. Confession is an inborn need of human beings before it becomes a dogma of faith. Since, according to the religious ideas of Tucheim, absolution was possible, why could not the doctor absolve him for a sin committed three years before, assuming that it really

was a sin? But the visitor lacked the courage and he contented himself with asking this question:

“Are you still a devout Christian, doctor?”

“Saint Francois de Sales maintained that to be a Christian it was not sufficient to believe in God and observe Easter, but let us assume that I am. Did I care for you badly when you were ill?”

“I go much further than that. If I had been obliged to die, I should have desired to die in your arms. Will you have a cigarette, doctor?”

“Permit me to decline. As a good Alsatian I prefer the pipe.”

As he said this Tucheim produced a red leather case, opened it with the

pious slowness of a sacristan unveiling a reliquary and took from it a masterpiece of pipe coloring, combining in the right places the rich tint of mahogany and the untouched whiteness of the meerschaum. He filled it without speaking, fully absorbed in the delicate operation; then with his eye fixed upon the bowl he lighted it. Happily contented he drew in the puffs.

“Ah!” exclaimed Tarragnoz to himself.

“Isn’t that fine?”

“Let me see.”

The officer took the pipe in his hands in order to examine it more closely. The monogram “R. T.” stood out in relief. Paul recognized it. Ten months earlier in his presence Madame de la

Guernerie had given the design to the pipe-maker. Wishing to be perfectly sure, he examined the interior of the case where the faded gold still permitted him to read the name Carlsbad. He withheld the question which came to his lips, for he did not profane the secrets of others any more than his own. Now, according to all the evidence, he was face to face with the secret of two persons. Tucheim misapprehended the cause of his silence.

“Come!” said the doctor. “I see that you are a connoisseur. That pipe is worth fifty francs if it is worth a sou. You think that is extravagant for a poor devil of a military doctor. Reassure yourself, captain; it was a present.”

Paul believed that he saw the door of confidences beginning to open.

“Good!” said he. “Some one cares for you! A friend? A sister? A fiancée?”

Tuchheim made a denial by shaking his head, his honest smile expanding more and more.

“No,” said he, finally. “A queen!”

“Of Madagascar?”

“No, a queen of beauty and whiteness. But, above all, she is the first woman that I really admired.”

“And you no longer admire her?”

“Oh! yes, unfortunately.”

## X

### THE BETROTHAL

Tarragnoz shortened his visit, as conversation had become impossible in the troubled state in which he writhed. Lovers do not care for a mystery, especially when they are left on the other side of the wall, behind which the unexplained thing is taking place. At this time he would have liked to ask a dozen questions, all equally impossible.

Where had the countess known Tucheim? How had she known the doctor well enough to buy him a pipe? Why, having consulted him upon the choice

of a present, had she carefully hidden the name of the person who was to receive it? When and where had they seen each other? Was it unknown to Madame Villedieu?

It must be admitted that all this was enough to make a lover uneasy. The good "parson" was beyond doubt more than an admirer of the countess. Thank heaven! he had nothing of that which constitutes a romantic hero, the thought of which causes the rival's blood to boil. Without doubt he would keep to himself the secret of his adoration. But why, if he was on such terms of intimacy with that household, had this matter-of-fact doctor adopted the romantic methods of a Don Juan—the screen and the ladder of cords?

To a lover whose curiosity reached the limits of torture, this *ensemble* of contradictions and obscurities concerning a woman who had become his one and only thought formed an intolerable torment. Upon leaving the doctor he started to walk, and this gave him the leisure to meditate upon a short plan of action. Just now, furious against Tucheim, heaven knows why, he wished to break with "one of the most devoted friends" of the countess, for that was what she called him. Rendered foolish by monstrous suspicions, and believing himself the object of an infamous deception, his dignity demanded that he let oblivion cover up his new-born love for the countess, just as a rising tide submerges the house of sand built by

children's hands; but sometimes we are like the child, who returns to his work when the waves retire. Paul wrote the same evening to Valentine.

Nothing is more doleful than a love letter written with a mental reservation in the heart. Madame de la Guernerie was too much of a woman not to feel that her correspondent desired to punish her for something, all the while doing his best to smile. She examined her conscience and, finding nothing there to condemn, she gave Paul to understand that their epistolary relations had begun in a less agreeable manner than she had reason to expect. "I am unhappy," was his vague response, but no one could doubt its absolute sincerity.

Thus disarmed, Valentine consoled

Paul, whom she believed to be saddened by a hopeless love. To tell the truth, her consolation was as unsatisfactory as that of jailers who try to console a man condemned to death by offering him cigars or playing dominoes with him. Nevertheless, between the lines, he read that her heart was not less exquisite than her face, only her replies did not aid in the least in solving the enigma, the solution of which Paul could not ask.

Ashamed of playing the rôle of a spy, he returned to Tucheim's house, and was still more ashamed in seeing the pleasure his visit caused; but when he began to beat the bushes the Alsatian pricked up his ears, became as cold as ice and showed that it was of no use to

expect any light from him. Thus the two sides held each other in check. There was, however, one difference. The letters of the countess were reassuring and drew him more and more from the idea that such a woman could be false. Tucheim, on the contrary, without being less loyal, had a rough hand. Certain looks, certain silences, were sufficient to make one believe that he suspected the secrets of Paul, while Paul was entirely ignorant of his. Besides, as may be readily understood, the captain was no longer able to bear the sight of the odious pipe, which had replaced the phantom of Walter. Little by little the two friends, so recently brought together, were again becoming separated. One remark of Tucheim

caused the cup of bitterness to overflow.

“Doctor,” said Tarragnoz to him, “I should like to buy that pipe of yours. What do you ask for it?”

“My dear fellow,” responded the Alsatian, “you are not rich enough.”

“But it seems to me that you are compromising the queen.”

“Indeed? You find me a tale-bearer? I might be one, but I am not.”

“All the same, if she knew that you called her *your* queen?”

“I think she *knows*, indeed, that I have not been enough of a tale-bearer with her,” replied Tucheim, his eyes gravely fixed upon the cloud going out of his lips.

Paul decided that he would not again meet this man, formerly so gentle, now



"I SHOULD LIKE TO BUY THAT PIPE OF YOURS. WHAT DO YOU ASK FOR IT?"



so aggressive. Besides, the time approached for his visit to Brittany, which would furnish the opportunity for a thorough explanation with the countess. When he was free to go, he left Paris and took up his abode in Auray, from where, upon his Morbihan pony, he was able to reach the habitation of his friends in one hour by a short cut across lots. The pleasure which he had for four months anticipated from this meeting was fully realized. The smile was no longer "dangerous" in the sense formerly understood, because it had become less rare. Madame de la Guernerie was a different woman. In her eyes the fugitive rays, evidence of the blooming of the first flowers, had caught that luminous fire of the sum-

mer sun which would shortly yellow the harvest, and Paul brought to her feet a harvest of love which one last warm ray would ripen.

When Madame Villedieu, fatigued from her walk, left Valentine to do the honors of the park for their visitor, she conducted him obliquely toward the little pine woods, screening the house on the side of the sea, a sea so blue that one might expect to see the smoke of Vesuvius in the distance. They seated themselves upon a bench. At this moment Paul had no question upon his lips other than the adroit and insidious interrogatories prepared during his night journey.

“Why is it,” said he, “that while you have become more beautiful, you appear

less inaccessible, less distant from this earth where poor human beings sigh? Is it that your coiffure is not quite in the Paris fashion, or your girlish white dress and your eyes less mysterious? It seems to me that I love you not more, but nearer. I said to myself in coming here, 'How many weeks, months, years, perhaps, must roll away before I shall dare to offer her my life?' All at once in seeing you I felt courageous enough to try. When I first saw you, if I had been able to speak, what would have been your answer? That I am insane? Then pay no attention to my words. I will fall back again into the abyss where I was, the abyss of sorrow, but also of joy, since I love you and you know it and are not displeased."

A witness of this scene, desiring the success of Tarragnoz, would have preferred to see more tenderness or more anger in the eyes of Valentine. She had listened without interrupting him. Coming to the question at issue, as the lawyers say, she made this remark, impressed with more *humor* than emotion: "That's what it is to be a clever man. If you win I must pay; if you lose the blow is nothing. That is the way, is it not, that you play the game? It is just that which leads to nothing, when we undertake to play the game with you men."

"So I have done a foolish thing in seeking to know my fate? Are you going to conduct me to the nearest asylum?"

“No, with such honest instincts one is never dangerously insane. You belong to the category of those who are permitted to wander in the country upon the condition that they do not attempt to set fire to the buildings, as you have just now attempted. Sometimes, even, if one is sure there are no matches in their pockets, they are invited to dinner in the evening.”

Then becoming serious, she added, “My poor friend, do not forget that I have passed the incendiary stage.”

Such was the first interview when Tarragnoz pleaded his cause, forgetting to draw her out on the subject of Tucheim, as he planned. This would indicate that a good lover would make a

bad judge in criminal cases unless the proof of guilt was overwhelming.

The case was not lost, but he was wise enough to restrain himself for the moment. Like a good tactician, Paul decided that it was necessary to amuse the enemy while awaiting the hour of victory. His silence was all the more welcome, as, without asking even for a little love, he gave much and with timely constancy, knowing when to be silent or to speak, according to the disposition of Valentine, which he divined with marvelous tact. He bore no resemblance to a lover repulsed, morose and filled with sighs. Besides, if he felt unhappy, he consoled himself with the thought that plenty of men would like to take his place. Each day he was able to see

Valentine alone amid admirable and poetic surroundings, and without being importunate he felt her confidence in him increase.

When he was at the end of his visit, commenced, continued and finished, within a radius of three leagues around Auray, the only visible result was that his small Brittany horse knew by heart the turnings of a certain path across the fields. Upon this placid animal the rider could dream at his ease, even when he returned home by the light of the moon. Whether he was actually making progress toward the sought-for end, no one could conjecture, except perhaps Madame Villedieu. She contentedly observed the deep sadness which her daughter was unable to conceal when

Paul went away. The correspondence between the countess and the captain became very active. On one side love filled the pages, on the other it was a question of anything but love; but the beauty did not close her windows to the serenade, and that was a good sign. Meanwhile, autumn drew near its close.

According to Valentine, the early part of November that year was particularly rainy upon the coast of Morbihan. "Besides," she wrote, "I pitied mamma and allowed her to bring me back again to the borders of the Yvette a little earlier than usual. My sacrifice is diminished by the pleasure it gives her." One might well ask if the mother was the only one in a hurry to see Paul again. However that might be, his calls were



THIS WAS ALL THE CEREMONY OF THEIR BETROTHAL.



resumed, and but a few evenings were missed. Above all, he did not fail to attend the first "Tuesday" of the rue de l'Yvette, and that afternoon, which to them seemed radiant in spite of the absent sun, Paul and Valentine found themselves again united in the little boudoir on the third floor.

A mysterious electricity vibrated in the air, saying to the lovers, "At last your hour has come." He fell on his knees, this time without speaking, and into his hands, like soft rosy fruit which falls because the constant suns of summer have ripened it, the beautiful hand of the young woman fell, delightfully abandoned. Then he sought her lips. This was all the ceremony of their betrothal.

Too quickly the tea which was sent up disturbed their *tête a tête*. They knew the sweet childishness of very young lovers; the sugar tongs confiscated, the fingers which replaced them kissed by eager lips and held for ransom, the perfumed beverage drunk from the same cup—all those innocent things which are nothing yet signify everything; and all too soon—the clock struck seven. Valentine exclaimed to herself, “What will my mother think?”

“Let us go to tell her.”

“No; permit me to disobey you already. Let us not tell her this evening. Let us deceive her, but can we do it?—after the fashion of those who love smuggled goods and enjoy them in secret. If you knew, dear, how for a

long time I have hidden myself—from you! In Brittany last summer, when I blamed you for proposing an unequal game of chance, for me the game was already nearly lost.”

Upon her lips, which the smile did not at this time leave, Paul received the stakes. Then he asked, “How long shall we hide ourselves?”

“How long?” said she. “For us time no longer exists; to millions of unhappy beings this afternoon now ended would have appeared interminable; to us, has it lasted a second?”

“No, my beloved. However, I am only at the threshold of happiness, and life is too short to lose a moment.”

“Ah! but one period of mine was long! Now go; my mother has no vis-

itor left, and she soon will come up here. A single glance will tell her everything if she sees us together. To-morrow, when you arrive, my hair will be better arranged."

"Yes, but I shall not then be able to disarrange it."

"How do you know?" whispered she in his ear. "Chance furnishes occasions if we look for them."

## XI

### “NOW YOU KNOW MY SECRET”

For one week they loved “in secret,” so unsuccessfully, in fact, that Madame Villedieu divined everything and was at the acme of delight. Not wishing the unhappiness of others, she arranged numerous “chances.” Paul, in their clandestine colloquies, declared that for a thousand reasons the marriage ought to take place in Paris in December. Valentine preferred Brittany with the sun of May, the blue sky and the golden furze. This great question resolved, always in secret, they occupied them-

selves with details. To tell the truth, it was Valentine who arranged the details, for Paul—he admitted it himself, had become incapable of putting two figures on a line or of arranging two ideas. But Valentine thought of everything, having a sure judgment and also that straightforward conscience which she appreciated in others. That was why one morning Paul received these pages relating “in detail” that which he had completely lost sight of:

“Dear, you are goodness itself. You have never asked me a question with reference to my previous life, apparently taking it for granted, to cite your somewhat studied speeches, that I have in a drawer the decree proving that I am free. That decree, in effect, I have. It proves at the same time that I have, if not lied, at least lived a lie. Although neither my person nor my present situation would in fact be affected

if I kept silent, I would not be worthy of you if I permitted the man whose name I shall bear to believe that which I have made the world believe, not by knavery, but by Christian charity. Beloved, master of my heart, judge me!

“When one crosses a muddy road it is necessary to walk fast; please understand what I am about to say in a few words. The Count de la Guernerie, a charming man and a fine conversationalist, accepted too quickly by my poor mother—I was but eighteen—was possessed of a terrible passion for gambling (you were surprised at my repulsion at the sight of cards). The love which he feigned was soon alienated. One morning I learned that he had other vices. Some miserable creatures held in their hands that which remained of his reputation and even his liberty, for they had the proofs. My dowry was used to redeem those proofs. Then my uncle, who had friendly relations with the chief of police, obtained the necessary time for the guilty man to disappear. The unhappy man promised—and to that he was faithful—that no one should ever hear him spoken of again.

“Then we invented facts for the world; a story of married life that had become impossi-

ble; the loss of money (that at least was not invented); a separation by mutual consent; Madame distressed and anxious to complain, but lacking the energy; Monsieur starting for America, as much to forget the trouble as to repair his fortune. As for me, I was able, thanks to the kindness of my uncle, to hide myself in Brittany in such manner that the scandal was soon asleep. My mother and I, as you have seen, are anxious not to awaken it.

“Thus three years passed; I never really felt sorry, having never loved that man. What made my life atrociously painful was the persistent disgust attached to my soul, just as certain sickening odors seem continually in our nostrils. Finally, I learned that the fallen gentleman was dead and, this no one would have predicted, he died like a gentleman and a good Frenchman because—that was one of his last words—he did not want his wife to spend all her long life in despising him. In fact, my friend, I have wept for him, and now pity is mingled in my heart with other feelings.

“The count did not go to America. Passing himself off for a Swiss named Walter, he served in the Foreign Legion. He found there one of

the most admirable men I have ever known, a military doctor who will be, I think, seated on high very near to Saint Vincent de Paul whose charity he imitates. He received the laical confession of the false Walter and his instructions in case of a sudden end. He cared for him when he was mortally wounded by a bullet, and it was through him that I learned of my widowhood.

“Thanks to him, also, the funeral report bore the true name of the dead man. Without that what could we do? When I was able to talk with the doctor—I have seen him many times—he employed all of his eloquence to make me admire the expiation, which was glorious and terrible, as he recounted it to me. He insisted, as if he were acting for a brother, that I grant my pardon to a repentant sinner, and I have forgiven him. The doctor, Rudolph Tucheim—never forget the name—is *my friend*. You will yourself remember the meerschaum pipe which we bought together in Carlsbad. It was for him that it was destined. He has never been willing to accept a more valuable souvenir.

“Now you know my secret, the only one in my life. I might have kept it since, naturally,

it matters but little to you whether the count died in the South or in the West, but my conscience would have tortured me perpetually. You compared your own on a certain day to too narrow shoes. That phrase was the first that drew me nearer to you.

"I am quite near now, and I say to you, good night, my friend, praying you to burn these pages. You will give me pleasure by never mentioning them.

"*A demain*; I love you.

"VALENTINE."

The phantom now resumed an attitude which was not even a menace but a joyful and cruel triumph. Tarragnoz saw it in front of him, although it was still broad daylight. To the convulsions of physical torture, displayed at the highest pitch, there was joined upon the visage of the dead a grin so odious that for a moment all pity vanished from the heart of Paul. From the wide open,

staring eyes one question came forth, a question which the grinning lips, speechless forever, would never have been able when animated to articulate more clearly, "*What are you going to do now?*"

At first a catastrophe appeared inevitable; but Paul decided to fall like a soldier betrayed by fortune, overwhelmed by numbers, not as an awkward straggler knocked on the head at the turn of the road. Above all, it was necessary to think of Valentine. In some way or other he must have twenty-four hours in which to formulate a plan of action.

"Poor little one," thought he, "like yourself, I am going to lie, and for a purpose not less excusable."

Then he sent this despatch to the rue de l'Yvette:

‘Received your communication at the moment of mounting my horse for an unexpected inspection. It is probable that we shall return in the middle of the night. Do not look for me before to-morrow. Is it necessary for me to say that I admire you still more, but I could not love you more than I do.’”

The clock indicated nine in the morning. Having obtained from his chief the evening before leave of absence for the entire day, he was obliged during the short truce to imagine some way to reply to the terrible question. But suddenly another question came to his distracted mind: “Can I marry the widow of the man I killed?”

Was he—and this doubt returned to

him for the thousandth time—a veritable criminal, or a victim of fate placed in a situation which suspended the effect of the moral law? Until now he had never consulted with anyone upon this question of conscience, which he had thought would remain purely theoretical since the dead never leave their tomb. Alas! *His dead* had come to life under another name. His name was not Walter, but the Count de la Guernerie. “It matters but little to you,” his widow had written, “whether my husband died in the South or in the West.” On the contrary, it signified a great deal.

The fragile vessel of the human mind, when the tempest blows, is in a few seconds carried from one pole to the other

of decision. In turn, Paul resolved to remain silent and marry Valentine; then he decided to break with her forever under some pretext; then to accept her as arbitrator and abide by her judgment. Would the recollection of each one of his caresses cause her to shudder with horror? Would she ever be able to see him again? He was always brought back to the one question, recapitulating all the others. "Have I committed a crime or am I the victim of a fatality?"

Perhaps one can imagine the chaos of an intellect which for three years had interrogated itself in doubt and solitude. On one hand Paul lacked the severe but luminous principle of divine moral dogma; on the other, he had never been

able to open his heart to any confidant whatsoever.

Rudolph Tucheim was marked for such a rôle, but Paul would first have to say to him, "It was you who, deceived by a lie, furnished me with the deadly poison."

Thus, beaten by the most violent inward tempest that he had ever known in his life, it seemed to the unhappy Paul that he had lived many hours since he opened the envelope, which was just like so many others except that they had been full of hope and gladness. However, toward the solution of the question which must be settled and which might prove to be a new fatality or a new crime, he had not advanced a step. His eyes sought the clock—quarter past

nine. He took his hat and went out, fearing, if he prolonged this *tête à tête* with himself, that he would lose a considerable part of his reason, already insufficient to pull him out of his frightful dilemma.

Having walked for some time at random, he found himself before the portal of a church. The faithful were entering or leaving, slowly or in haste, carrying upon their faces a tranquillity which Tarragnoz sorrowfully envied. Suddenly he remembered a remark which Rudolph Tucheim had made to him, "Yes, I go to confession; if you knew how good it is." Without hesitating, he went up the steps, wishing to try, not the sacrament, but the right which all men possess to say to the priest:

“Listen to me! I know that my secret will die with you.” Already, in his thirst for any remedy whatever, he was troubled at being obliged to wait. On the further side of the church he met a white-haired ecclesiastic directing his steps toward the door.

“Without disturbing you too much,” asked Paul, “are you able to grant me a few moments’ conversation?”

The old abbe smiled without replying, but his gesture signified, “I am not here for anything else.”

When they were alone in a sacristy, the priest paused to see if the visitor would seat himself or kneel. Paul took a chair. Eager for relief, without seeking a preliminary explanation, he commenced with the words:

“I killed a man three years ago. At that time the act seemed to me to be lawful. Since then I have had doubts and I consult you because you have wisdom and experience.”

“Experience, at least. Am I right in assuming that this was the result of a duel?”

“No, but a deliverance implored with shrieks of pain which are ringing in my ears at this moment.”

Paul recounted the lugubrious history; then he remained silent, his eyes fixed upon the impassive face of his auditor. The priest meditated a short time before putting this question, “If I understand you correctly, you pretend that your conscience was not opposed

to—the deliverance accomplished by you?”

“The doctor had declared that death would be certain and inevitable, even in the best hospital in Paris.”

“Did you consult him upon the lawful or unlawful character of the act premeditated by you?”

“He would not listen to me. ‘In such a case,’ said he, ‘a doctor has not even the right to ask the question.’”

“No more have I, a priest. *Non occides*. Minister and servant of God, think you I can discuss a commandment, troublesome in certain cases I admit, but perfectly clear to my understanding and also as clear as any command you have ever received from your superior officers?”

“And that is all that you, a minister and servant of God, are able to do for me?”

“On the contrary, I can indeed do for you that which is given to no human power. I can, if God accords you the grace of sincere repentance, send you away in peace, with your conscience delivered of its burden.”

“Our understanding of the word *conscience* is not the same. Mine is human because I am a man.”

“The human conscience, as you call it, means something else. In my eyes, a determination contrary to the catechism bears the same relation that a soldier’s conscience, contrary to discipline, does in yours. It is reason substituted for the superior rule. But see where this

brings you! Your reason disturbs you to-day as a result of the act which it permitted you to commit yesterday.”

“Perhaps we ought to regret the blind faith of the vanished ages,—but one last question. This time I address myself to the sage who knows all the complications of life, and not to the priest. Suppose, in this case, that the man who delivered the dying one is on the point of marrying the widow. Do you decide that he could proceed?”

“Ah! there is a beautiful proof of the usefulness of the catechism. Those who have not passed in it have not the least idea of the number of complications that it turns aside even in the material existence. If the man of your hypothesis had obeyed the commandment, *Non oc-*

*cides*, he would be a very worthy husband, after having been a friend, devoted to the point of heroism. What more can I say? You summon me as a pilot for a vessel whose compass you have abolished."

"You can at least pray for the crew in the wreck."

"That I shall do with all my heart. You are very unhappy?"

"I do not think there are many men more unhappy than I at this moment. We shall meet again, perhaps."

"That, among other blessings, is the one that I shall ask for you."

## XII

### THE REVELATION

Paul, once more alone with his anguish in the tumult of the street, thought at first "I am no further advanced." Nevertheless, the calm silence of the church, the sympathetic words of the priest, brought to him an astonishing pacification of the nerves. The phantom held itself discreetly in the background, estimating, doubtless, that a creditor ought to accord to the debtor the time to turn himself after legal action is taken.

Suddenly, almost unexpectedly, the

truth appeared very clear to the eyes of Tarragnoz, as an island rises suddenly out of the mist when the breeze awakens.

“No,” admitted he, “I can no longer think of taking the place of the man I killed. It matters not whether I hasten the certain end by an hour or by a day. It was I who gave him the merciful stroke. No one knows anything of it. Even she might remain in ignorance of it all her life. But my life, already haunted, would be nothing but a nightmare, poisoning each moment, even the sweetest. It is necessary to say adieu to her. But how?”

His heart was almost broken when he pictured her despair. He would have embraced a stranger who came to him saying, “Thou shalt not see her again;

thou shalt no more hear her name. But be ye without disquietude; the secrets of the magicians are mine; with one stroke of the wand I will make her forget and be happy."

Alas! magicians have disappeared. He would have to act for himself. As he walked he considered the different modes of action which offered themselves to him.

To kill himself? Surely, that was the simplest way; but by his death he would displace the question without explaining it. Instead of explaining why he did not marry Valentine, it would be necessary to explain why he had taken his own life—two *whys* making but one. To break with her gradually? To make her believe that he was unfaithful?

That would be a grotesque comedy above the powers of any man. Besides, he knew only too well that some day, seeing her sad or indignant, he would throw off the mask and, falling to the knees of the only woman that the world contained for him, he would bring matters back to the same point.

The same terrible conclusion forced itself on him at every turn. He must imitate the loyal frankness of Valentine and recite to her the drama. By word of mouth? Many reasons dissuaded him from that course. The principal one was this: The history of the affair finished, he would be obliged to endure the anguish of the last scene, of the separation, of the word of farewell thrown with horror, or—still more frightful—

with tearful lamenting. Then it would be better to write, as she herself had given him the example. At once he gave his aimless course the right direction and proceeded toward his home, surprised to discover that he had not left his own neighborhood. It seemed as if he had walked many miles. A clock indicated to him that it was but half-past ten and that caused this desperate reflection: "Would he have to go on twenty or thirty years at this coefficient of velocity?"

But he was anxious not to divert his mind from the task imposed, the most difficult, without doubt, that anyone in the world had before him, for he discovered that an action, considered almost a duty at the time and place, took

on a facetious resemblance to a crime pure and simple when he was obliged to justify it before any tribunal whatever. His defense consisted in showing to the wife—disarmed by the expiation—her husband dying in torture, begging for death with the cries of an animal dissected alive and the doctor himself, pale with horror, powerless, making the sign which condemned without hope.

The doctor! Paul rapped his forehead and the passerby might well have imagined by the brightening up of his face that they were meeting an inventor who had finally mastered his idea. Rudolph Tucheim, the best witness for the prisoner that he could summon in this lost cause, was also the best adapted to perform the mission. That safe man

had already accomplished a similar task in the prologue of the *dénouement* about to explode.

It was true that Tarragnoz would first be obliged to confess his deception; he had by a falsehood obtained the morphine entreated by the dying man. He might expect harsh words from the mouth of his old friend—his shoulders raised with pity.

“Poor Tucheim!” thought he, “I will listen to every word without becoming angry—in my present situation!”

He had already jumped into a cab. Unfortunately, as the journey was long, he had too much time for reflection, so that he made the affair complex when in reality it was very simple.

“My ambassador is also my rival,”

thought he. "Without doubt he is, or rather he was, an unhappy rival, considering Valentine as a queen placed above all longing. All the same, he told me that 'the queen' had divined his folly." What a triumph for a lover who hopes for nothing, to be able to place at the foot of the throne the head of the man who had hoped for everything!

This entrance of jealousy upon the scene at the moment when Tarragnoz was already suffering a thousand deaths was for him a refinement of torture.

"Return!" cried he to the driver. Then thinking he would be obliged to write the terrible letter, "No," ordered he at once, "continue."

"Idiot!" murmured the driver of the cab.

When the doctor ten minutes later opened his door for the captain, it was almost an enemy, without knowing it, that he had in his presence.

“I come to bring you some very agreeable news,” announced Tarragnoz, after formally shaking hands with the doctor.

“You do not have that appearance,” observed Tucheim, becoming serious in the presence of the understood sarcasm.

“Even if the news is good, it is not so for me; permit me to proceed rapidly. I came to solicit your kindness, to ask you to perform an act which no other living being would know better how to accomplish.”

“And of what does it consist?”

“I want you to inform the Countess

de la Guernerie at the earliest moment of the breaking of my engagement with her. Let me say in passing that you ought to have warned me that my ex-sergeant Walter had been her husband. I presume that you were in her confidence."

"Yes, it was I who informed the countess of her widowhood. Upon my return to Paris I talked with her, as I had promised. I have seen her many times. She has been pleased to say that she is grateful to me, but, upon my honor, I was ignorant of your engagement."

"Be that as it may, it is impossible for me to marry the widow—of Sergeant Walter. That probably astonishes you."

“No,” said Tucheim, without looking at the captain, “I understand your scruples.”

“You know then?”

“I know that you asked me for a flask of morphine *for yourself*, at the time when your companion was suffering—God will bear witness—the most terrible pain that the human organism could know. I know that the death of the wounded—of the condemned man—supervened soon after you received the flask. Your manner of looking at the question of life and death was not the same as mine; it was easy for me to put the facts together, so that your decision surprised me but little, although I was able to measure the bitterness of it.”

“Please do not insist. I count upon

you to explain to the countess that it is not an inexcusable criminal who disappears from her life. Even if I committed a sin, show to her that my punishment is hard enough to merit her pity. But you will say what is necessary. I am not disturbed upon that point. Besides, I imagine that the embassy is not unpleasant to you."

This time the gray eyes of the Alsatian did not refuse the battle. Paul had no trouble in reading the question which they clearly asked. He responded, with his hand pointing towards the table, "I was with the countess when she chose that meerschaum pipe. She designed the monogram in my presence. 'The present of a queen' you said to me."

“Yes,” interrupted Tucheim, “the one time in my life when I was not known to keep a secret. But I have never aspired to marry Madame de la Guernerie. I think you are convinced of that.”

“No matter; you know the proverbs of the Arabs: ‘The dog does not eat the hay, yet he bites the goat which wants to eat the hay.’ Come, doctor, you have a fine opportunity to remove the wretched goat forever from the flowers of the meadow.”

“Yes, the opportunity would be fine—for a dishonest man.”

“What would be the dishonesty in your going to the countess and telling her that I killed her husband? That is what I ask you to do.”

“Captain, you did not kill Sergeant Walter.”

“Alas! With these hands I gave the unhappy man three injections of your morphine, stroke by stroke, without even withdrawing the needle from the skin.”

“I was certain you would do it, and that was why my morphine—was not morphine. I made a liquid for you of the same appearance, but less dangerous. Had I refused you, God knows what other means you would have taken.”

“Yet he died almost immediately.”

“Perhaps his hour had come, or, indeed, that it was a case of auto-suggestion. We do not know how far that can go. I have never seen a stranger

case. Whatever it was, you did not kill the Count de la Guernerie. Consequently seek no longer for an ambassador. That shows you that a 'parson' can be of some use."

"Will you shake hands with me?" said Tarragnoz, with tears in his eyes.

The men separated after a hearty hand clasp. One of them again took the cab and gave the driver an address which may be guessed; the other filled his meerschaum pipe, looked at it for a long time and, without lighting it, placed it upon the table. When a smoker sulks his tobacco it indicates, as everyone knows, that he is passing a bad crisis.

## XIII

### THE DECISION

“The ladies are still at luncheon, captain.”

The visitor came down to earth at this response, which he received in the rue de l'Yvette. The announcement that the ladies were still *at dinner* would have surprised him less, for since reading his morning mail the idea of duration of time, which is our interior clock, no longer operated in his brain.

“I will return soon,” said he to the servant.

He started to walk along the neigh-

boring streets, which at that time were almost deserted.

Did not this respite come opportunely to prevent a false movement by which he would risk foundering his ship within sight of port? He would have run to the feet of Valentine and related to her, while thrilled with delight, the fear which he had had of losing her. He thought only of himself, of the bound that he had made in a single morning from felicity to despair, from despair to happiness recovered. But he was not the only one interested in that question. Although satisfied himself, the situation threatened to appear less simple to a woman, and especially to a woman subject to religious scruples. Innocent of the fact, was he not guilty of the in-

tention? Without doubt the words pronounced by Tucheim in Algeria and by the priest two hours earlier would again find themselves in the mouth of Valentine. *Non occides!* What conclusion would be drawn? What sentence rendered? Was it wise to confess his sin, to seek a judge there who would weigh her verdict, when he could if he chose to remain silent, find only a loving woman opening her arms? Why speak? Why disturb the peace of a happy soul? Tucheim, the safest of confidants, had declared "You did not kill!"

But Reason, the guide, better inspired this time than it was by the bedside of Walter, presented to him this dilemma: "If your fiancée determines that no barrier exists between you, would it not be

better to have her affirm it? If, in her eyes, a barrier exists, by what name should a man be called who would dare to overleap it? How could he speak of love to his wife possessed through surprise and ignorance? And how scornful would be the laugh of the grinning phantom lying in wait for the nuptial bed!"

"I will speak," decided Tarragnoz, "and I will speak at once."

As this was the "day" of Madame Villedieu, on leaving the table she had returned to her room in order to dress, a proceeding which always took considerable time. Madame de la Guernerie, at the sight of Paul, manifested a happy surprise.

"This, then, is the 'unexpected in-

spection' that your telegram announced! What an idea to come so early. Of course you have had your luncheon, for without it I hope that you would not take a hundred steps in the street. Why this strange appearance, my dear! Are you going to start off, seat yourself, or remain standing?"

She looked at him more closely, became a little pale, and, lowering her voice, asked: "Was it my letter that put you in this state? Did you come to tell me that?"

"I came to tell you that I love you."

"Ah, well! Then?"

"I also came to tell you that it was I who picked up your—Sergeant Walter when he fell, yonder!"

Valentine uttered a stifled cry. "Let us go up to my boudoir," said she.

When they were sheltered from all indiscreet ears, she spoke. "It was you, then, who risked your life for him? Doctor Tucheim doubtless mentioned your name, but the name was unknown to me—and I confess I have done my best to forget that end——"

"You might say, that rehabilitation."

"Yes, it might be a rehabilitation in the eyes of others. In fact I have pardoned him."

"As a good Christian; but who knows if the good Christian that you are will be able to absolve me?"

"For the second time this morning the same recital is imposed upon me. It will be hard to listen to, for you who

love me—and whom I love. In a moment, perhaps, you will have only horror for me. But this is the occasion for me to repeat my parable *à propos* of conscience. Could I drag myself along by your side the rest of my life with aching feet? No, I will not!”

“I think,” said she, “I could pardon you for anything save having been wanting in honor, but I have no fear upon that point.”

“My honor is safe,” said Paul, “as to the rest—we shall soon see.”

He commenced the history of that night, which he would gladly forget, but which fate obliged him constantly to remember. Tucheim, out of pity for the nerves of one poor woman, had not given to the picture its poignant relief.

Paul, on the contrary, advocate of his own cause, made no attempt to mitigate the horror. He was careful to compel his judge to pass through the same anguish that determined the final act; pleading insanity, he was at least obliged to show that a man could become mad, after enduring such frightful hours.

This desperate eloquence, he could see, did not fail to produce its effect. Madame de la Guernerie, her hands clasped, her eyes closed, submitted to the ordeal without speaking, without failing, except through her shudderings as she listened to the words of Tarragnoz. But when he related his visit to Tucheim, the morphine requested and promised, Valentine, hiding her face

in her hands and unable to restrain an exclamation of fright——

“Pray say no more! I understand—and you are in my house! Could nothing stop you? Great Heaven!”

“I am here because Tucheim sent me. Just now he said to me, ‘That which I gave you that night was not morphine. You had no hand in the death of the unfortunate man.’ Shall I bring you his testimony? He is ready to come.”

“No, I believe you. But you *wanted to kill!*”

There was a painful silence; then giving way again, she softly wept. Paul, fearing that these tears were but the eternal adieu to their hopes, humbly supplicated, “Have pity for me—for yourself, since you love me. Do not say

the word which will disunite our lives. See the things as they are; the death of no man is between us."

She again repeated, "No, but you *wanted to kill!*"

Then he tried another argument. "Dare I cite to you the precept which I have always admired? 'Judge not!' Who knows, had you found yourself in my place, what course you would have followed."

"Since you cite our precepts, do not forget the one which would have guided me, 'Thou shalt not kill,' and had you heeded that we should have never known the anguish of the present moment."

Her tears redoubled. Paul understanding that the order of arrest trembled upon the lips of the judge, fell upon

his knees. He did not even presume to touch the hand of Valentine, for he was in terror. For the third time since morning the irresistible commandment came back to his ear: *Non occides*.

Madame de la Guernerie finally dried her eyes and with a firm voice pronounced this sentence, which Paul welcomed with ecstasy, as it was only banishment for a week—he expected something more grievous.

“Tuesday, at this hour, we will see each other again—if in the interval I have not manifested to you a contrary desire. Now leave me. I can bear no more.”

Tarragnoz, decidedly consecrated to the unusual, experienced each morning an impression which was as remote as

possible from the commonplace, in the fear that he would perceive in his mail the writing of the woman he adored. Every morning he turned his eyes away when his orderly brought him his letters, not wishing anyone to see his face if the suspended sword fell upon him. As he slept but little, he was not disturbed by nightmares and the phantom remained invisible. Besides, his real nightmare in the future would no longer be upon the frontiers of Morocco, but in a small house in the rue de l'Yvette.

The Tuesday following, no thunder having rolled in that direction, he started after a luncheon as unappreciated as the one he had forgotten on his table eight days previous. Twenty times since morning he had oscillated

from hope to fear. Hope said to him, "She would not be so cruel as to make you come only to immolate you with her hand." "She might, indeed, wish to justify in your sight her condemnation," suggested Fear. In the presence of Valentine he found himself not much advanced, her appearance was so grave and serious. She extended her hand to him and her straightforward, honest look did not turn aside with the confusion of a tender approbation. Evidently this was not to be a question of tenderness.

"I have," said she, "reflected much and prayed much—for you, perhaps still more than for myself. Two considerations trace for me my duty. First, I have made you a sacred promise; next,

in the eyes of the world, nothing authorized me to break it."

The court evidently did not desire to condemn, but Paul felt that he was before a stern tribunal. Relieved by Valentine's words of his fear of losing her, the thought that he might no longer find the same heart in the same woman, caused him but little less terror. He sadly formulated this plaint, which was the *all or nothing* of a veritable lover.

"It is not the payment of a debt which I ask for. Do you fear a legal process?"

"Perhaps," admitted she.

Astonished at this language so unusual, and dreading other wounds, Paul remained silent. She divined the suffering inflicted. "Let us understand each other. The adversary which at-

tacks me is myself, not you. During this long week it was against myself that I kept up this horribly obscure process. In the eyes of the world, I repeat once more, nothing separates us. Human morality would probably absolve you as it has formed your reason; but there is a divine morality, which is *my morality*. Before my conscience you are guilty of a murder by intention."

"Then," groaned Tarragnoz, "it was to hear an adieu that I came?"

"Have I the right to reproach you for a situation which is my fault? You honestly warned me during our first meeting. In your soul the place of religious dogma remains empty. It was dangerous for our future, but becoming blind—you know how—I have gone on.

No, I have not the right to punish you. So much the worse for me if I suffer from it."

"And I have promised you that you will be the happiest of women!"

"I shall not be the happiest of women—in certain respects. I shall tremble night and day at the thought of that other life, which may separate us if you leave this world with a crime upon your conscience; but, inspired by my love, I shall unceasingly offer one prayer which some day will be granted. Then, oh! my dear, I shall be the happiest of women in all truth."

Paul, without responding, considered the extent, until then ignored, of the sacrifice that he had just received.

"How much nobler you are than I," sighed he.

"I am not nobler, but perhaps I love better. Courage! The hoped for hour will come, even if it requires a miracle. Let us try to smile. Come and embrace your wife!"

Astonished to see that he did not hasten to obey, she interrogated him with the tender look of her beautiful eyes.

"Keep your kiss," said he, "for the moment when you shall no longer see upon my brow that which frightens your faithful heart."

Valentine understood, but, not wishing to extract a conversion as others would extract a gift of jewels—"Do not go too fast," counseled she, her voice

again becoming grave. "If you are saying this merely to satisfy the caprice of a devotee I should rather have you remain an unbeliever. I have never been able to pardon Henry IV. for having said, if he really did say it, that Paris was well worth one mass."

"We shall not go too fast, dear Saint," said Tarragnoz, kissing her hand, "and to show you that this is serious, you will not see me for some days; and during that time—a mass will be worth more than Paris."

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